



*Alfred Hill*

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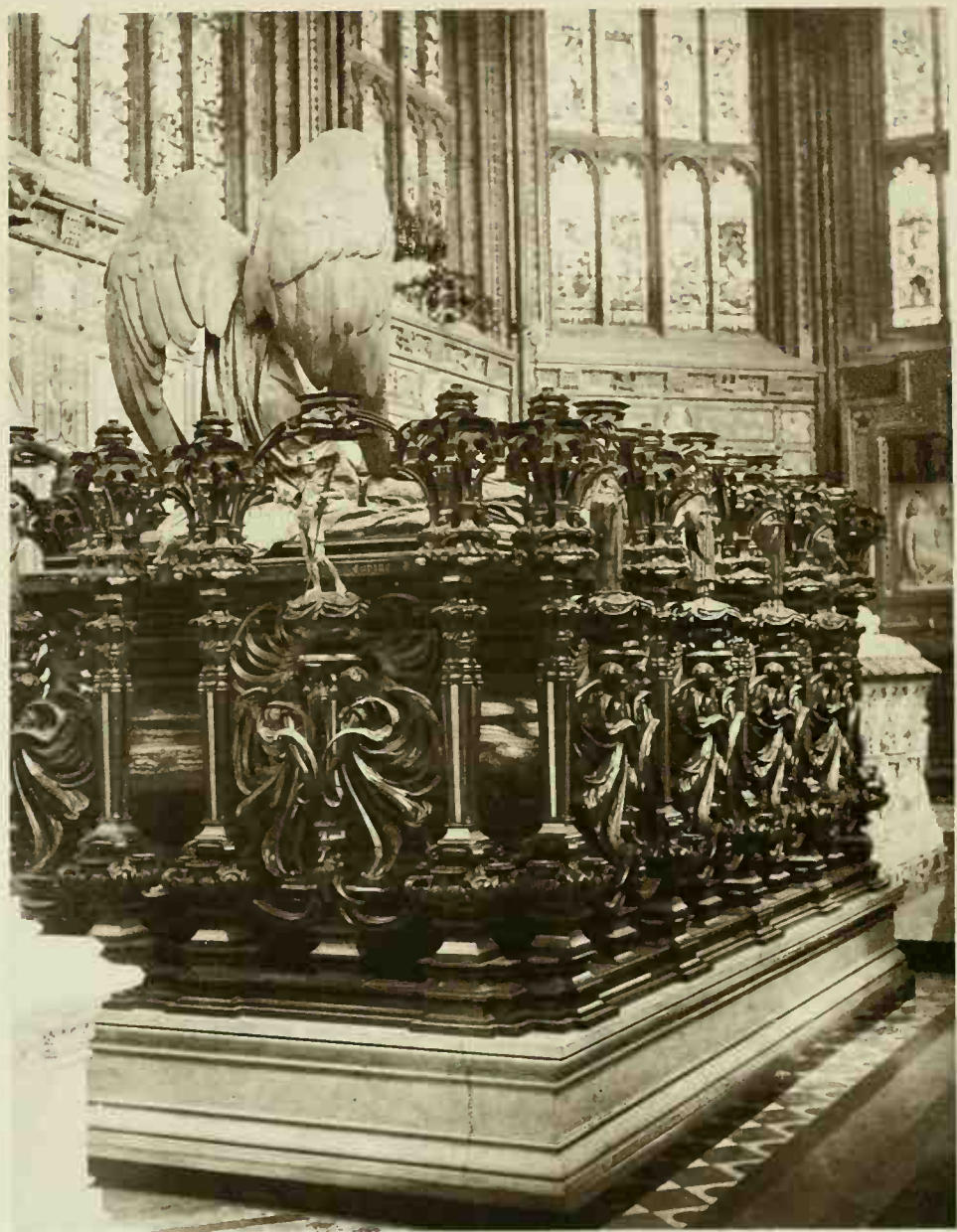
ALFRED GILBERT

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AMERICA . .	THE MACMILLAN COMPANY 60 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
AUSTRALASIA	OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 205 FLINDERS LANE, MELBOURNE
CANADA . .	THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, LTD. ST. MARTIN'S HOUSE, 70 BOND STREET, TORONTO, 2
INDIA . .	MACMILLAN & COMPANY, LTD. 276 HORNBY ROAD, BOMBAY 294 BOW BAZAR STREET, CALCUTTA NORTH BEACH ROAD, MADRAS







*Photo. Hollyer*

THE DUKE OF CLARENCE MEMORIAL. ALBERT CHAPEL, ST. GEORGE'S, WINDSOR,  
FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

Sketch-model exhibited Royal Academy, 1894. By gracious permission of His  
Majesty the King. *Pages 129-141.*

# ALFRED GILBERT

BY  
ISABEL McALLISTER

WITH FORTY PLATES IN PHOTOGRAVURE



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1929



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

TO  
CHARLOTTE GILBERT

AN EVER WONDERFUL MOTHER

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest ;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.

SHAKESPEARE : SONNET XVIII.





## INTRODUCTION



It is no easy task to be the biographer of so complex and puzzling a personality as the subject of these memoirs. Alfred Gilbert's character is a paradox. A superman, his aims are the highest, and he has been perpetually misunderstood. Temperamentally extremely nervous and retiring, yet phenomenally strong to assert himself as an artist. A lion in redressing the wrongs of others, a born fighter, yet gentle as a lamb. A great satirist, but magnanimous towards the failings of mankind. Clear-sighted as to base motives, but allowing himself to be exploited, through sheer indifference to what he loses. Giving largely, and receiving nothing. Lenient towards the smallest artistic efforts, so long as the artist is sincere, yet unsparing in criticism of his own productions.

Like the Wise Men of the East, he brings with him Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh—Gold for the kingly attributes of his work; Frankincense for "the Father of Lights", from whom comes every perfect gift; and Myrrh for the sepulchre of hopes unattained. And, all the while he is creating, he hovers between the Mount of Transfiguration and the Valley of Humiliation.

Heredity and environment are the two great factors that govern man's mentality, personality, and destiny. Some think that environment is the stronger and can overcome inherited faults, that a child's original disposition can be so moulded by training that he can be practically re-created. This may be true of certain normal mentalities; but the genius is ruled entirely by heredity, and, as he walks through life along that definite pathway he makes for himself, is both removed from, and unmoved by, the influences which shape other men's careers. He fashions his own environment, overcomes circumstances, breaks all the laws that govern art, yet surpasses all the efforts of others, to whom those laws are essential as a guide. He has his own ways of learning and of doing everything. Whilst

others wait for the tools to work with, he makes them himself. Claiming complete freedom in his action, he steps over barriers in his way, and, in his giant stride through the world, he fulfils his dreams and attains those purposes for which he was born.

We hear to-day a great deal about the power of the subconscious mind. The genius is he whose subconscious mind is his to use freely. He works by suggestion only; and, with the same unfaltering skill with which the spider spins her web and the birds build their nests, he weaves his thoughts and fancies into a perfect design.

What, then, is the difference between genius and instinct? I see none, save in degree. Genius is the power to accomplish great things, by a natural instinct, without any training; to create, instead of copying others. The genius makes no mistake in the pursuit of his task, as animals, when allowed to follow what we call their instinct, are always unerringly right.

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# ALFRED GILBERT

## CHAPTER I

### THE BEGINNINGS



It has been said that a genealogy is only of interest to the family concerned. It is necessary, however, to refer to this one in particular, since it is of great assistance in the endeavour to trace the influence that produced a unique personality. Believers in heredity will find a confirmation of their theories in Alfred Gilbert; for his art and his music, his love of the sea and of science, have been transmitted to him through long generations of highly gifted progenitors on both sides, until they have culminated in overwhelming force in one individual of an extremely complex character. It seems almost as if some fairy, whether wise and beneficent or ill-disposed, had attended his christening and bestowed on him a quadruple share of each of the attributes of his ancestors.

Without giving the whole of his family tree, I will touch lightly on a few of his forbears. On his father's side, he is a descendant of the famous discoverer of Newfoundland, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who was half-brother to Sir Walter Raleigh—both sprang from the same father, but they had different mothers. The two brothers enriched the world by their lives and left illustrious names. Belonging to the same family in later times were Sir John Gilbert, R.A., and Sir W. S. Gilbert. And on his mother's side he can claim descent from John Hatton, who wrote the music "To Anthea", and from John Parry—the musical entertainer.

His mother, Charlotte Cole, was descended from a man, who, in the year 1600, owned with his brother large estates in the West

Indies. They subsequently came to England and settled in Bristol. Mr. Cole married an English girl and founded a family destined to become famous for their brains. Perhaps the most remarkable descendant of this family was Gilbert's grandfather, James Cole, an artist born and a craftsman of the rarest merit. What other men by education struggled to realise by rote, he was able to do instinctively without any special education. A wonderful musician, he not only played the organ at the village church, but also built the instrument. He would on occasion sing a song in the village inn to full acclamation, just as he would conduct the little orchestra for the theatrical performances given at Stoke Edith, the country seat of his landlord and friend, Mr. Foley. He was considered without an equal at carving a stick, making a gate, or pruning a tree, and he would constantly produce freaks of horticultural nature to everyone's astonishment. He was a man whom all honoured and never dared insult, a man of peace—but woe betide the one who sought war. A visionary, he saw beauty in all around him. A lonely wanderer at times, he would disappear for two or three days spent in meditation and communing with nature. His pets were a toad and a raven, his friends were his trees and his plants. His love was his wife's and his children's. His hobbies were numerous, but always intellectual. For the rest, he was a country gentleman of independent means, the owner of an exceedingly comfortable house, "The Laurels", at Tarrington, which had an unrivalled garden, the result of his own taste and skill. Here, in his country home, he loved to entertain his friends, give counsel to all who sought it, and substantial help to those in need. One of his quaint customs was a stocking he kept hung on the wall of his parlour, with a piece of whalebone at the top to hold it always open. Anyone in want of money was advised to put a hand in and take what he required. There was always a store of coins in this queer purse, which was at every man's disposal.

James Cole was a giant in height, broad and strong in frame, so that his diminutive wife could stand on one of his great hands, and he would stand up and hold her in that way at arm's length. She, many years his junior, was a striking contrast to him in every



direction. He was a Bohemian by predilection, and she severely conventional, attired always in the richest of silk dresses, with a wonderful lace cap and fichu; and she carried a gold snuff-box, so that she looked as if she had stepped from the frame of some Old Master. A member of a county family, she was an aristocrat to her finger-tips, and sometimes mourned her great-hearted husband's easy-going and unceremonious tendencies. Fully in accord with her was Lady Edith Foley, whose husband was owner of nearly the whole of Tarrington and the employer of most of the men in the village. He and James Cole were bosom cronies. They knew the histories of all the inhabitants, their griefs and joys, and it was one of their pleasures to pay an occasional friendly visit together to the "Foley Arms" of an evening, when James would enliven the admiring rusties with music and songs, and Foley with amusing stories. These were red-letter days for the villagers, and proved a welcome interlude in their stagnant lives, for institutes and libraries were unknown. The difficulty that presented itself to James Cole was how to get away from home without reproachful looks and words from Theodosia, his wife. There was always an amusing little comedy which made his family secretly smile. First came Andrew Foley, strolling quite casually past "The Laurels"; then followed two loud whistles, and Mrs. Cole pricked up her ears. "What's that?" she would ask, though she knew the signal well. "James, that is Mr. Foley's whistle"—but her husband had vanished.

His manner of greeting his friend was always the same: "What, you, Foley?" "What, you, James?" Andrew Foley would exclaim, as if greatly surprised. Then the two delinquents would make off with all speed to the "Foley Arms", the property of Foley. Meanwhile, two indignant grass-widows nursed their wrath, and Theodosia, on her husband's return, would tell him what her father would think of such conduct. "*That* for your father, and *that* for your father!" James would retort, snapping his great fingers. When tears were near he would say gravely: "Theodosia, there's no more need for rain, the fields are wet already". Tears or no tears, he continued to give joy at the "Foley Arms".

James Cole's children were all extremely musical, but the majority, lacking ambition, were content to spend their lives quietly in the country. Two out of his nest of linnets became known to the world as singers and musicians, and this came about quite accidentally. One day four friends paid a visit to James Cole—Shirley Brooks, afterwards Editor of *Punch*; James Davidson, the accomplished critic of the *Times*, and the husband of Arabella Goddard; Jarrat, the impresario; and Desmond Ryan, critic of the *Standard*. Charlotte and Susannah sang to them, Davidson accompanying them on the piano, and their guests were so deeply impressed by their gifts that they urged their father to send them to London to study professionally. At that time such a project seemed outside the range of possibility; since careers for women were undreamt of by parents.

Happily for his children, James Cole was a genius, and perhaps had already realised that their talents would never see full development in the village of Tarrington. He acted unhesitatingly and placed them at the Royal Academy of Music. They had learnt singing hitherto under their father's instruction, to his violin accompaniments, as was then the fashion. They must have been very proficient, for in the same year that they went to London they made their first appearance at Exeter Hall, and were engaged to sing at the Hereford Festival. They were the first to give Mendelssohn's two-part song, "O Would that My Love", and the composer taught them how to sing it. For many years the sisters sang together at classical concerts and in oratorio. Susannah became understudy to Jenny Lind, and Charlotte, who met her future husband at the Academy, continued as a public singer for some years after her marriage. Mr. Alfred Gilbert was seven years her junior, but his serious manner and sense of responsibility made him appear years older than his contemporaries. When he appeared as a suitor for James Cole's daughter he was accepted and heartily welcomed into the midst of her family. Charlotte's wedding was long remembered at Tarrington as a great event. She was immensely popular everywhere, and a large number of musical friends escorted the prospec-

tive bridegroom to Tarrington the day before the wedding. The system of travelling by rail was in its infancy. The party occupied open carriages resembling cattle-trucks, and there were many changes before they reached their destination on a pouring wet day. They were met at the station by the bride's father who, with his band of musicians known as "the Apostles", preceded the guests to "The Laurels", discoursing sweet music. They were received with great hospitality, and the rejoicings were carried on for some days after the wedding. The marriage was an extremely happy one, without any shadow of sorrow for many years.

Mr. Alfred Gilbert was born at Salisbury on October 21, 1828, and at fourteen became a pupil of Dr. Charles Corfe. He entered the Royal Academy of Music in 1845, and studied theory under the famous master Charles Lucas, and the piano under Robert Barnett. The Principal of the Academy was Cipriani Potter. Mr. Gilbert soon established a choral and orchestral society, "The Orion". He next founded "The Polyhymnian Choir", famous in its day. He was one of the first members of the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, and was Honorary Musical Director for forty years. He was director of the Musical Artists' Society, founded for producing the works of English composers, and he manifested his musical scholarship and judgment as a director of the Philharmonic Society, as well as its orchestral manager. In 1851, in conjunction with the Misses Cole, he organised a series of Classical Chamber Concerts, which met with the greatest enthusiasm and appreciation. He was organist at several London churches, yet found time for operettas, cantatas, choruses, songs, and orchestral compositions. A man of method and indefatigable energy, he regarded as a recreation a work of utmost importance to his pupils, the editing and fingering of the works of the old masters.

In character Mr. Alfred Gilbert was a man above reproach, deeply respected rather than loved. Of the strictest integrity, a good husband, a generous father, ever self-sacrificing in the interests of his family and of all who deserved his sympathy; cold of exterior, but possessing a flame of love that burned ever brighter for wife and

children as the years rolled on; he was the real mate for Charlotte Cole.

A musician by profession, but a man of letters and erudition by inclination. A teacher of music by force of circumstances, always a lover of Art, for Art's sake by preference. A composer of music by instinct, but a failure in this direction by life's ironies; a man of iron, yet as malleable as wax. An impenetrable being to most people; yet, to those who possessed the key to his nature, as simple as a child. Lenient, indulgent, forgiving to those he loved. Such was Gilbert's father.

There are many people who remember Gilbert's mother. She resembled her father in every way, even to the minutest details of lineaments; and she possessed the same mental and psychological characteristics. Always of a sanguine temperament, a musician born and cradled in music; a genius delighting in her profession, yet a great home-builder, she passed through life smiling, undaunted by adversities, practising love to all around; of great energy and will power, full of originality, and ever a true woman. She possessed no striking beauty, yet she fascinated those with whom she came in contact, and drew out the best in everyone's character. Believers in heredity may find the confirmation of their theories in her, a daughter inheriting all the gifts of her father, and passing them on to her whole family.

A short time before the birth of her eldest son, Alfred, it fell to her lot to sing in oratorio at Oxford, and her *pièce de résistance* was "Let the bright Seraphim", to the obbligato by Harper, the celebrated trumpet-player. The performance was as enthusiastically received as any that Jenny Lind gave at that period.

The subject of these memoirs was heralded into the world by music, and afterwards cradled in it. No wonder, then, that connoisseurs feel that music pervades his sculptural creations, since it permeated his whole being. Charlotte Gilbert being a dreamer and visionary, it was not surprising that on such a momentous occasion she should experience a psychic demonstration. She afterwards said that there appeared to her a vivid apparition of a woman in a



crimson cloak, and steeple-crowned hat, bearing something hidden beneath the folds of her cloak. What the woman carried was not revealed to her, but the expectant mother looked upon it as a warning or omen. She was a Celt and, like her countrywomen, superstitious, and she always remembered this vision, though she was never able to link its significance with anything that happened at that period. But twenty-two years later her thoughts were again directed to this dream, at the time of the birth of her first grandson, Gilbert's eldest child.

It is rather like forestalling history, but the sequel must be told now. Gilbert married his cousin, whose father had emigrated to Canada with his second wife many years previously; and, as is sometimes the way in such cases, no communication whatever had taken place between the families since they sailed. His wife's father wrote to Gilbert's father, after many years, that he had been greatly troubled by a curious apparition which had appeared to him three times: he had seen his first wife, in a steeple-crowned hat, bearing something hidden under her red cloak. The dream appeared to have given him a shock, for his letter was a tremulous appeal, which showed that the flood-gates of old memories had been opened, and that his affection for his daughter (Gilbert's wife) had suddenly revived. He was apprehensive that this dream was a warning that something tragic had happened to her.

Gilbert's father wrote at once, telling him of the birth of his grandson, and that the dream he mentioned was only a repetition of Charlotte Gilbert's experience. He could give no explanation of the meaning of this singular happening, that from the world of fantasy a figure should have stepped forth on an occasion fraught with the peril attendant on the mystery of new life, then disappeared into the same realm, only to reappear across the seas on a similar occasion, to a member of the same race, twenty-two years later.

Gilbert's parents, soon after they married, experienced another psychical phenomenon that was inexplicable. Theirs was an old house, with a well staircase, and his mother, coming through the hall one evening, distinctly saw the figure of a woman, who carried a light in her hand, pass down the stairs and vanish. She sought

his father, who was incredulous, and instantly discounted the incident, which, knowing her imaginative temperament, he attributed to her fancy. Whilst they were talking, his brother Frank came in, and described the same apparition, which he had just witnessed. The husband was then ready to accept the statement as a fact. "I don't know what to think," he said. "Here are two independent witnesses who have had the same experience." By this time they had moved into the hall, and were gazing up the stairs—when suddenly her husband called out quickly, "Someone passed me! There—there—there she goes!" and they all three saw the same figure glide up the stairs, and disappear.

Gilbert's father was by nature inclined to analyse coldly everything of a psychic character, and up to this time had no belief whatever in "spooks", but he was convinced of the reality of this vision, because the three of them had seen the same thing.

Alfred Gilbert was born on August the 12th, 1854, and, as his extreme delicacy of constitution caused the doctor to abandon all hope of his living, he was hurriedly baptized. His father in his anxiety had never thought of a name, so the clergyman helped him by the reminder that it was the anniversary of Alfred the Great. "A very good name," said the reverend gentleman approvingly, whereupon he was christened Alfred, which means, "Ever Shining". I have spoken of his life being, like his character, full of violent contrasts. From extreme delicacy he soon arrived at extraordinary strength of physical power, which he has maintained up to the present day; though he has passed through enough tribulations to kill any ordinary man. He lived—to become the favourite son of his mother, and to know the satisfaction throughout her long life of sharing his thoughts, aspirations, and triumphs with her.

His earliest recollections centre round the house where he was born, 13 Berners Street, Oxford Street, London. To the right and left of the home lived two great musical artists and rivals, Vincent Wallace and Balfe. Middlesex Hospital stood at the end of Berners Street, which at that time was chiefly inhabited by medical practitioners, artists, literary men, and makers of musical instruments.

It was a quiet street, and motors and bicycles were then unknown. Hence the little boy played in it with neighbours' children, and seldom saw cabs or wagons, or even passers-by. There were no disguised graveyards for London children then! One of his companions was Vincent Wallace's son, and some of the children attended a school in Poland Street, Soho, where the master's name was Funnier. The life at Berners Street was a busy one, and Gilbert's memory of his mother recalls her walking to Hammersmith and back, to give lessons in singing, and on other days journeying into the country for the same purpose, retracing her steps in time to dress and sing in public, always gracious and never unsuccessful.

At the age of seven he was taken to stay at Salisbury, Wiltshire, with some relations named Vandenhoff, who owned the dyeworks there. Uncle Vandenhoff, a Dutchman and a brother of the famous Shakespearian actor of that name, was at that time an old man with grown-up daughters and a dear little old wife, who reminded the child of Queen Elizabeth. But he never could take his attention off the old gentleman, as he stalked about, with his hands behind him, dressed in semi-clerical garb, with a gold chain and pendant crucifix round his neck. During his wanderings he constantly paused to puff and blow like a grampus. Whilst the child held his uncle in great awe, he quickly succumbed to all the female members of the family, who worshipped him. A trusted servant and friend of the family was Charlotte, who adored him. He can remember her wonderful tales, and her unceasing care of him. She resembled Peggotty in character, but not in appearance. Smallpox had destroyed for ever all traces of comeliness, and he can remember himself as a beauty-loving child wondering at her placid resignation to such disfigurement. A pious character was Charlotte, for she used to say she thanked God that her life had been spared. Like her employers, she was an ardent Roman Catholic. The Vandenhoff family was a stronghold of Romanism, but so liberal and unaffected that no attempt was made to influence the little boy.

One thing alone was forbidden him, and that was the passage of the closed door at the end of the garden, opening out upon a

rivulet which silently but rapidly pursued its course, bounding the row of houses whose garden limits were defined by the stream. He managed to get there sometimes, and catch minnows! Charlotte knew, but never betrayed him to his aunt. One day she took him to the shop of one Edmund Found, the foster-child of his grandfather; and he recollects the good woman's denunciation of the real father of Edmund Found, and the wrongs that such men inflict upon the innocent.

This is the story of Edmund Found. Grandfather Gilbert was an important man in Salisbury, with a business clientèle established all over Wiltshire. A wealthy man and a benefactor to those around him, he sat on the Board of Guardians of Salisbury. A mysterious find in the churchyard of St. Edmund, a living male child wrapped in fine linen, was announced one day, and afterwards presented before the Town Council. Grandfather Gilbert volunteered to adopt the foundling, and named him Edmund Found. Time rolled on, the foundling became a youth, and his foster-father took him as an apprentice. The mystery of the parentage of this foundling was never solved, in spite of the fact that from time to time Fortune seemed to smile upon "Nobody's Child". And no one knew from whence these favours or benefits came, though they were fairly guessed at, and the guessing at once put to rest primary speculations, and the theory of Edmund Found's parentage dropped.

Gilbert was well cared for and loved at Salisbury, and this period was one of which he preserves an affectionate memory. How clear are the impressions that are etched in childhood! He can recall these old-world people vividly, and trace their influences on his own character. In looking back more than sixty years, he can gauge the measure of their humanity and their great generosity towards their fellow-men. And this spirit is traditional in his family. Silently his father carried out the same principles as his forbears; so that the income he worked so hard to acquire was divided and subdivided, to provide for a number of poor relations, and for others who had no claim upon him whatever. It was not until after his death that his son knew the true extent of his charities, and, though he had many





*Photo. Hollyer*

THE KISS OF VICTORY.

Bronze statuette, 1879. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1882.  
By permission of Montagu Temple, Esq. Pages 43-44, 54.



claims upon him already, and had, too, his own charitable schemes, he continued to provide for his father's old servants and others, until death claimed them in turn. "One must be just before one is generous," was a favourite saying of his father. Just and generous he was to everyone but himself.

One of his father's pensioners was his old Aunt Ann, who lived with her half-sister in a street behind Regent Street. Both were supposed to be worthy recipients of his bounty, but when Aunt Ann died she left to another relative a large store of golden sovereigns in a workbox, which she might have returned to the generous donor. The only relic she bestowed on him was an ancient hat-box which she treasured because it had belonged to an old Admiral, a relative, round whom she had woven a romance. This legacy was christened "The Admiral's hat-box" by the Gilberts, and it reposed in the garret, dedicated to nails and tools.

One of the last men in the world likely to need help was his grandfather Francis Gilbert; yet he lost his large fortune through no fault of his own, and years before he died came to live with his son and be supported by him.

Gilbert, then, was brought up in a large-hearted atmosphere, and lived amongst quite unusual and very unworldly people. He did not realise it at the time, having never experienced the reverse; and to this day he is unable to understand the nature that shirks responsibilities, counts the cost, and gives only to exact something greater in return.

Amongst the valuable impressions he received on the first visit from home, Charlotte's devotion was the most lasting of all: Charlotte, his daily companion, who told him stories, marvellous, but carefully chosen, often romantic, yet befitting his tender years; always at work; with her strange complexion, such as formerly used often to be seen, the unhappy legacy left to those who survived smallpox.

Meantime, great changes had taken place at his home. His parents had left Berners Street, and had taken a large house in Maida Vale, with a beautiful garden. Still more wonderful to him

was the advent of a baby sister. He was brought home from his haven of rest in Salisbury to a new abode, and he still remembers his impressions upon being welcomed by his brother and sister. The newborn sister was a marvel for him to feast his eyes upon. He found a garden, in which there were roses, and all sorts of flowers, fruit trees, and vegetables galore—all this in London! And as they journeyed in this field of delight the only words uttered were, "You must not tread upon the borders, Papa says so".

Tragedy and comedy alternate throughout life, and the new house, so full of music and laughter and gladness, was soon to be closed and darkened for a period of sorrow. In 1861 came the weight of a nation's grief. The Prince Consort had died, and all good men and true mourned him. About the same time Mrs. James Coie answered her last summons, and Gilbert's parents were called to Tarrington to see her off on her last journey. It may be easily imagined that the grief of a State, mingled with that of a family bereavement, was anything but lively for a child.

The terror of the darkened house fell like a pall upon the eldest son, leaving an impression that he never has forgotten. The boisterous play with his brother and sister was subdued, the servants thinking it almost impious that there should be anything in the form of indulgence in childish enjoyment in the garden. The poor children played as best they could by gaslight in those shrouded rooms, when God's light was playing over the garden and calling them in vain to chase their shadows amongst the trees and flower-beds. Little did one of them dream that in years to come he would be called upon to create an imperishable record of the grief and sorrow of the dead Prince Consort's son, Edward the Seventh.

Then came the return of his parents from their mournful mission. "The time of the singing of birds" had come. Once more the garden was opened to the children. Oh, the joy of it!

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOOL DAYS



GILBERT'S first school was merely a delightful nursery, a place of romping and junketing all day, with occasional lessons under the direction of the kindest of women. But time sped on, and he was ripe for the real schoolboy's career.

His father had a relation, a distant cousin, who had married a quondam soldier by ill-judged enlistment, but a man of parts, who came to see his true power, and, acting upon his enlightenment, opened at Southsea a preparatory school for aspirants to the Services, chiefly the Navy. Whether it was Gilbert's early exhibitions of combative nature, combined with his abnormally developed physical promise, he cannot say; but he believed himself at that time dedicated to the Naval Service.

The whole life of the school might lead any boy to such a supposition. They passed more time in boats daily than in the class-room. Boys were continually leaving in their schoolboy dress, and returning in the envied uniform of the lowest rank of Naval officer. He remembers Lord Charles Beresford dashing in one day, radiating vitality and *joie de vivre*, wearing his new uniform for the first time; and how the youngsters clustered round him, tried on his cap, and admired him to their hearts' content! He was one of the older boys, and was a great favourite on account of his dash and sparkle, besides his many other good qualities. He was a handsome youth, and maintained his youthful high spirits and good looks to the last.

One of the boys, much his senior, had a brother at sea in the Merchant Service. This lad had the true sailor's nature, and was gifted with much of the speculative dreaming of "those who go down to the sea in ships". He told one day of a wonderfully vivid dream, in which his mother had seen a youth overboard, and recognised in his cries for help her elder son's voice. This happened in the days



of "windjammers". The telegraph was little more than a toy, and wireless was not yet projected. At last, months later, news came that upon a certain date, in a certain longitude and latitude, the youth had fallen overboard, while helping to take in sail, and lost his life. This story made a great impression on the boys.

The marriage of King Edward and Queen Alexandra took place at this time, and Gilbert saw the Fleet beautifully illuminated, and shared in the great rejoicings when the "Sea King's Daughter" came to these shores.

Gilbert was not destined to become a naval man, though he was to be the father of sailors. He was recalled home, much to his regret, for he was perfectly happy at Dr. Kemshead's school at Southsea, and resented the loss of a uniform, which had loomed in the distance. His father having failed to get him into St. Paul's School he went to "The Mercers'", the affiliated school, a probationary establishment under the same governing body, where he awaited his turn. Dr. Edwin Abbott was the headmaster during his time there. He hated the place, where he was bullied by the vulgar and fought the greatest bullies, as a token of which he still carries a scar of victory. Leslie, the great Academician, his contemporary but senior, was brought up at this school, but before his time.

He remembers Holborn as it was before the Viaduct existed. The journey by omnibus to the bottom of Snow Hill, by way of Holborn from "the Bars" to Farringdon, was exciting. One morning the traffic was diverted. It was the occasion of the execution of Muller, one of the last to suffer in public; and along Farringdon Street to Ludgate Hill he happened to be seated on what is known as the near side, and about the middle of the long bench which ran the whole length of the vehicle. Progress up Ludgate Hill was slow, owing to the congested traffic, and, as ill-fortune would have it, just as they arrived at the street leading to the Old Bailey, the omnibus came to a standstill, and he had the pain and horror of beholding in the distance the grim scaffold and its ghastly occupant. The impression has never left him.

He was too overcome by what he had seen even to attempt an

explanation for his late arrival, and he received an unmerciful caning on the palms of his hands for being late at school. The ordeal over, other victims would have followed, but they had more nerve, possibly by right of their superior age, or duller susceptibilities, and they were able to excuse themselves, though they would not deprive their brutal instincts of the sight of his suffering by a timely word on his behalf.

He has often thought of the incident since; the seething mass of human beings congregated together to witness the death agonies of a poor wretched malefactor. In the crowd there were doubtless hundreds as bad or worse than the victim, some of whom might have been called upon to serve as a spectacle to a throbbing inhuman crowd.

Gilbert suffered many canings; but in a fair fight he has never been beaten. He once asked an old gentleman what the motto meant, *Dum vivo vivam*, surrounding the emblem of a cock on the panel of a hansom cab. "Fight to the death, my cock", was the reply of one who was a sportsman, a bass singer, and a descendant of Sheridan, but not much of a scholar.

Gilbert disliked London, and when the news came that he was to be removed to a school in the country it was received with rejoicing. Visions of green fields, open air, Nature, all that to him seemed superlative, arose before him. He was a Mercers' boy, Dean Colet's foundation forbade his becoming a Pauline, so the trustees of Richard Platt, Citizen and Brewer of London in 1597, had pity on him. He was translated from a Mercer to a Brewer, from the yard-measure to the gallon and hogshead. Here is his own description: "I attended one dull morning at the Brewers' Company's Hall, with my father, who duly paid his fees, while I busied myself with the consumption of the time-honoured bun and glass of wine—not beer! Be it said now that I believe I swallowed a whole hogshead of beer in imagination; for upon the bun was impressed the arms of the noble gentleman and founder, Richard Platt, the design being beer-barrels and sheaves of wheat. It was a quaint ceremony within the majestic domain of a lordly Company.

"I knew nothing of mediaeval pomp at that time other than my

reading of Sir Walter Scott's novels; but I had heard that aspirants to admission to the Brotherhood of Freemasonry had to undergo the ordeal of a red-hot gridiron like St. Lawrence; and although I had my doubts, I still had fears during my father's absence and the munching of the emblazoned bun. My suspense was shared by other boys, who were also victims to the indigestible bun. There was one stolid youth who failed not in his duty of bun-demolishing; he spake never a word, but silently masticated. He might have been Death personified, had he not possessed the attributes of rude mortality. He was big and round, silent and gentle. Later I met him at school; he continued the same, and I believe he was happy in his non-success in schoolboy honours and passive life. William Barnard, K.C., was that boy. In his day the most astute of men in the arbitration of male and female defence troubles, he was the most innocent of youths in his boyhood."

To Aldenham Grammar School, then, he went after the buneating orgy in the pompous abode of the Brewers. And a little later there came to Aldenham a youth of comely yet retiring mien, a child designed to be imposed upon by his physical superiors, but, as later proved, mental inferiors. These are dead or forgotten; but the lad, Stanley Owen Buckmaster, through his capacity and perseverance became Lord Chancellor, and is alive to tell the tale. Gilbert, ever an enthusiast, disliked Latin and Greek from the scholar's standpoint, but he loved and revered the miracles produced by the Greeks and Romans. He had already begun to make effigies of mankind from the clay of the ditches surrounding the school. Some of the choicest clay was obtained from the vicinity of the churchyard, and it devolved upon his lawful fags to procure it. His first portrait was Buckmaster, a poor attempt he says, but an earnest one. What a pity it was not preserved!

Gilbert's holidays, after he had gone to Aldenham, were all too short and full of bliss. His greatest pleasure was to be with his mother wherever she went. Mrs. Gilbert not only sang in the choir, but was foremost in assisting in church work. Gilbert used to escort her to church, and enjoyed hearing her lead the singing at St.





WOMAN TEACHING CHILD.  
Marble group, 1879. By permission of H. L. Doulton, Esq.



Mark's, Hamilton Terrace, where the Reverend Bellew preached to a crowded congregation. He was an extremely handsome man of many gifts, an eloquent and persuasive preacher, an accomplished elocutionist, with dramatic powers. He joined the Church of Rome later in life. But another attraction led Gilbert to church when he was about eleven. In the pew behind him sat a fair-haired little girl, to whom he was devoted. During the holidays he carved a stick, and interwoven with the fanciful decoration was a portrait of his charmer. He carried the stick to church, and swung it over the pew just in front of her nose. But she saw no resemblance to herself, and was only lost in wonder and scandalised by such an unexpected proceeding. He was disappointed that she had not understood his motive to please her with her portrait done as well as he could, yet he never referred to the matter when he saw her, and this little incident illustrates a strong characteristic of his—in all his actions throughout life he has never troubled to explain.

His mother's sister, Emily, married a man named Peacombe, and had a daughter, also named Emily, who was an amazing genius at music, having the same gifts as her grandfather Cole, her aunt Charlotte, and cousin Gordon. How the idea first arose Gilbert never knew, but his mother and Aunt Peacombe arranged a matrimonial alliance between him and Emily when they were children playing in the same nursery. When Gilbert went to school he was told to write every week to his cousin, and she was encouraged to do the same to him. But Fate interposed. When Emily was sixteen she went into a rapid decline and died, so the romance created and enjoyed solely by the two mothers came to an abrupt end. But Aunt Peacombe was sentimental to the last moment, and, most likely inspired by the example of Rossetti and his dead wife, placed Gilbert's schoolboy letters under her daughter's head as she lay in her coffin and put his photograph near her clasped hands, and these emblems were buried with her. It was a morbid, even absurd act, for there was no romantic feeling whatever between the children.

The coming of his brother Gordon to Aldenham marked an important epoch in the elder brother's life. Till the age of nine this

frail child was the constant solace and care of his parents. Most of his time was spent in darkened rooms, and books were prohibited. He had joy nevertheless, for his mother read to him, told him stories, played and sang to him until he developed a love for and a susceptibility to the power of sound which impelled disobedience to all injunctions, and literally compelled him to essay on his own account the expression of his soul's inspired love.

There were musical instruments in most of the rooms of his home, and in his own room a piano upon which his mother used to accompany herself to please her boy. He was a tiny piece of humanity, so young and small that while standing in front of the instrument his eyes could barely overlook the keyboard. It may be imagined, then, that some considerable effort on his part was needed to allow him to gratify the keen desire within him to touch with his fingers the keys and produce sounds in imitation of his mother's magic. He found these means, and more: his untrammelled brain soon guided his hands, and through their rapidly acquired prowess drew Mrs. Gilbert's attention to his aptitude.

A born artist herself, she was no sluggard in realising that she had given birth to a prodigy. So henceforth there began a systematic form of instruction, though, long before it had gained much way, the object of it had already begun to race with his teacher. The veil of sickness was beginning to lift. Light was more freely admitted into the rooms, the child was given full liberty to enjoy his passion, and the result was that at about the age of nine, joy and wonder reigned in the home at the sight of the invalid son playing from memory almost any of the masterpieces of Handel, Bach, and others of the great masters, and accompanying at sight his mother's singing.

His father was of a non-emotional nature as far as outward appearances gave signs. Yet he had been known to shed tears over a touching story. He was a self-imposed guardian of his innermost heart's secret; a bad one, however, about this time, for he gave way to almost hysterical expressions on a certain occasion when the boy, standing up to the piano, accompanied his mother from memory in Handel's "Let the bright Seraphim"—the very song she had sung at

Oxford shortly before her eldest son's birth. Doubtless this association helped to cause Mr. Gilbert's emotion.

Perhaps I may be allowed a short digression here, prompted by the mention of Handel. The young Gilberts' parents, as true lovers of their Art, always wished to extend their activities on its behalf; hence the numerous musical societies they established. Handel's compositions were greatly in vogue, and they were worshippers at his shrine. They instituted an annual festival to his memory, a quaint and original one. A party of musicians used to meet at their house once a year, and drive in two brakes to Cannons, the Edgware estate of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, where the vicar, organist, and an audience awaited them in the Duke's private chapel. A recital of Handel's music was given, Mrs. Gilbert singing the solos, and her husband playing the same organ that the great composer used for some years after 1720, when he was appointed Director of the Private Chapel of Chandos.

What memories of Handel were evoked as they sang selections from his oratorios! And they were happy memories, for the period of his life spent at Chandos was rendered ideal by his understanding and considerate patron, who, realising the nature of genius, placed no restrictions on him. His duties were to direct the choir and play the organ. The result was "A daily musical Service performed by a Choir of voices and instruments superior in number and excellence to that of any Sovereign Prince in Europe". It was exactly the right atmosphere for creative work, and he produced the twelve Chandos Anthems, the two Chandos Te Deums, his cantata *Acis and Galatea* and most of the "Suite Pieces" for harpsichord, in complete tranquillity of mind. He established the opera in England, and *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* records this fact that "Mr. Hendel, a famous Master of Musick, is gone beyond sea by order of his Majesty, to collect a Company of the choicest singers for the Opera in the Haymarket Obligato". Another Handel Festival in miniature was held one year at Hinckley, Stoney Stanton, Leicestershire, whence George Eliot drew inspiration for *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Recitals were given all day in the church, and in the evening the

Reverend Charles Sankey, the Rector, gave a Commemoration dinner, with a silent toast to Handel's memory. On these occasions the Gilberts were hospitably entertained for some days by their good friends, the Rector and his family. The former closely resembled the Duke of Wellington in appearance—and in character he was a man of narrow views and many prejudices. Up to a certain point in his life he had always regarded musicians, artists, and actors as mere strolling vagabonds, with whom he had small sympathy or patience. But he happened to attend the performance of *The Messiah*, when Mrs. Gilbert sang "Let the bright Seraphim" to Harper's Trumpet Obligato, and he was so completely carried away that when he attended a musical party afterwards given in the Gilberts' honour, he asked for an introduction to them. He was further impressed by Mrs. Gilbert's winning personality and charm of manner, and found a real delight in her husband's culture and learning. From that day they became close friends, and frequently exchanged visits. The Sankeys' sons were extremely musical, and two of them composed; later on both these joined the Church of Rome. One became a priest, and another was a master at Harrow.

Mr. Gilbert's old friend, Mr. Riley, accompanied them on their visit to Hinckley to take the part of bass singer. The morning they started he arrived before breakfast, having walked to Maida Vale from Kentish Town. During breakfast Mr. Gilbert, who possessed a practical mind, suddenly asked, "Where is your luggage, Riley?" The old man then drew a minute packet from his pocket and held it up. "It is all in here," he said, laughing. "But don't you realise we are going to stay some days?" objected Mr. Gilbert. "That may be," said Riley carelessly. "I have all that I want here."

He was an oddity, but so genial, witty, and clever, that they allowed him to do as he wished. He was married to an exacting wife of whom he pretended to stand in great awe. When he used to dine with the Gilberts he had to depart early. "Stay a little longer, Riley," his host would say. "No, no," he would reply, "time is on the wing, my buck. 'Black Eyes' is waiting for me." And he would leave hastily.



The time arrived for little Gordon to join his brother at Aldenham. The latter had announced his coming with pardonable childish pride, extolling his gifts. Alas! he had cast the seeds of his good intentions upon the stony ground of his Philistine brethren. What did they care about genius? How could they share his enthusiasm, these future shepherds of souls, future slayers of their likes, these embryo healers of diseases, these hustlers and hucksters, potential money-changers and usurers in the Temple?

Gordon was duly brought to Aldenham and handed to Alfred Gilbert's care by their parents. The elder boy, in his enthusiasm, had foreseen no possibility of trouble. In all confidence he left his little brother to mix with his new associates, never dreaming of other than happy result. Besides, he was sure in his own mind of his power to impress others, and would have thought an assertion of protection on his part derogatory to the dignity of one he trusted so much, and upon whom all his love and respect were centred.

He found he was mistaken. His foreword of praise had actually raised envy and antagonism in callous natures, and he soon became engaged in a series of cruel combats on his brother's behalf, through which the peace and popularity of Gordon was firmly established. Alfred, being a fighter born, saw no merit in his gladiatorial conquests; he only regarded himself as a temporary buffer, a player of the game, till his brother could play his trump-card.

There is no truer saying than "The child is father to the man". I have already mentioned two boys in that school who were distinguished for their love of fair play and gentleness to those who were weaker and younger than themselves. They came forward as protectors and champions of young Gordon Gilbert, during those first days of his at Aldenham, and thereby won his elder brother's gratitude and esteem. Both chose a profession which affords a wide scope for redressing the wrongs of humanity, and their names—Stanley Owen Buckmaster and George Barnard—stand high as champions of the cause of justice and mercy.

Long before his first term had ended Gordon Gilbert had not only gained a name as a brilliant genius, but had an extraordinary



ascendancy over the whole school. He was a born leader, and was extremely popular with everyone. His health improved miraculously, he grew broad and strong, and was noted for his sunny nature and high spirits. With all his capacity for fine scholarship, he was a thorough boy, and delighted and excelled in games. Hence he rose rapidly from the lower ranks of the school to the higher classes, became Captain of the School at the age of thirteen, and held this office till he left four years later.

Alfred disliked the routine of school life, and took no interest in the academic system of acquiring knowledge. He enjoyed browsing amongst books only when he felt inclined, and the pursuit of his favourite subjects at his own free will. Curriculum was as distasteful to him as to Keats and many others of great vision and poetical gifts, and like them he never shone as a scholar, though he kept his place in class. He longed for freedom to follow his own way of acquiring knowledge, and never looked forward with any pleasure to his father's decision that he should go to Oxford. He was unhappy at this time, for he saw breakers ahead. Whilst realising that his brother was carrying all before him, he knew he had been idle. Yet, for the life of him, he could not bring himself to put forth the efforts necessary to obtain an open scholarship at the University.

The truth was he did not want to go to Oxford.

By this time, 1872, the elder Gilbert was in the top form, and his brother, in the one below, would be in the highest by next term, and though four years his junior, would soon outstrip him. He was troubled when he thought of his father's ambitions for both his sons and of the limit of his means to help them forward. Doubts assailed him whether his brother would prove his value in open competition, despite his confidence in his gifts. He felt himself wavering between the callings of Science and Art. His brother was not only an artist, but a scholar born, and knew definitely what profession he intended pursuing. His forensic powers led him to making the Bar his goal.

Gilbert was merely passing through a phase of extreme nervousness and dissatisfaction with himself and his surroundings, and his fears were never realised in actual fact. He now appealed to his

father to remove him from Aldenham, and he wished to renounce his promised bounty as far as Oxford was concerned. He even dared an ultimatum (over which he was afterwards filled with remorse) in the form of a threat to run away to sea should they refuse his request to enter the medical profession at the forthcoming examination at the Royal College of Surgeons.

His appeal was heard and acceded to, just six weeks before the examination was to take place. Soon after, he passed his examination and was free to choose his medical school.

While he was awaiting the result of the examination, he joined, in obedience to his natural bent, the art school in Newman Street, presided over by Mr. Heatherley, successor and relative to Mr. Lee. He also attended daily at the British Museum, to study as best he could the Elgin Marbles.

The idea of the medical profession had not been given up. He was merely filling in time and satisfying his own desires till the date appointed for competition for an open scholarship at Middlesex Hospital (his father's choice) should arrive. He failed to gain that scholarship and, in his growing enthusiasm for Art, was not greatly grieved at the fact. His father, in face of this obvious devotion, was too wise to reproach him, and henceforward he was encouraged in the full enjoyment of his chosen calling.

About this time his thoughts and hopes were centred in his cousin, Alice Gilbert. He was in love, and he longed with the impatience of youth for the consummation of his happiness. It was a halcyon time for him, as he stood at the portal of life with all its promise of Summer's joys. That the prospects offered were shadowy and uncertain mattered nothing to one possessed of an extremely sanguine temperament. Mundane affairs never interested him. Difficulties were there to be overcome. Still uncertain whether his brother would justify his father's hopes, and hospital study holding out no prospects, he was aware that his course at the hospital would sorely strain his father's resources, whilst his brother's gifts would more fully justify speculation, as events proved.

Neither of the brothers ever claimed the portions reserved for

their future. Gordon not only paid his way, through his many scholarships, but sent handsome presents to his parents, spending little on himself. Alfred went his own way, with his father watching and ever ready to help his individual efforts should he need it.

Alas! Gordon Gilbert died soon after he had attained his majority, and his all too short University career, upon which many hopes had been raised, came to a close, leaving nothing but sorrow and silence in its wake. His father never really recovered the blow; his mother, with a stronger character, summoned all her fortitude to her aid for the sake of those still living and hid her grief solely through the strength of her love and a phenomenally sanguine nature. Her spiritual vision enabled her to see this life as a transitory pilgrimage, a time of probation. Such a nature is a real optimist's, and the feeling in the bereaved family grew to be that this beloved member of the home circle was not far away. To-day Gilbert sometimes dreams he is alive, and in converse with him, giving him comfort and consolation.

But no shadow of grief had yet fallen upon the family at the time when Gilbert was a student at Heatherley's and just admitted to the Royal Academy Schools, having definitely put aside all aspirations to the practice of medicine which he really loved, as impossible of realisation. Image Maker, then, instead of Image Mender he was to become.



*Photos. Hollyer*

PERSEUS ARMING.

Bronze statuette, 1882. Exhibited Paris Salon, 1883. *Pages 55-57.*





## CHAPTER III

### LIFE AT HEATHERLEY'S



**A**FTER his failure to obtain a scholarship at Middlesex Hospital, Heatherley's School in Newman Street became an Elysium to Alfred Gilbert, who still remembers his delight at the first days spent there. Around him were men and women of all ages, and boys and girls. It was a curious place, a museum of relics of all sorts of man's industry, indolence, sportiveness, success, failure, and all the passions—real, affected, vain, or crowned—of mankind.

Heatherley was a sombre and quiet man, so kind and gentle that no one dreamed of any other attitude towards him than that of implicit faith and unbounded respect. He was a power as a teacher, and, although he rarely exercised his strength as a disciplinarian unless absolutely obliged to, no one ever dreamt of taking advantage of his good nature, nor of tasting his wrath, which was not dormant on necessary occasions. This expressed itself rather in withering satire than in any exhibition of temper. His look, half-reproachful, half-disdainful, if not pitying, was enough to quiet the most turbulent youth or the most intractable girl. He wore a black velvet garment, which left nothing else but the venerable head, the nervous hands, and the slippered feet in view, as he silently stalked the studio, or sat in the seclusion of his half-lit private room, where he dispensed to all who sought him much good advice and always sterling assistance. At times some boy, for want of thought, would indulge in his proficiency at whistling, possibly to aid his weakness in drawing. Then would come forth the caustic rebuke of the seer, who had silently ensconced himself beside the dilapidated skeleton in a corner of the studio, backed by a row of shelves, upon which were arranged all sorts and conditions of pots and bric-à-brac, whose colours were dimmed and begrimed by the dust of ages. "I like singing!" he would say in a chanting tone, suggestive of an old-time High Priest.

Heatherley's holidays were usually spent in repairing the skeleton and judiciously, though not ruthlessly, removing the superfluous dust from the empty pots of all colours, and from all quarters of the globe, which formed its background. Empty they were except for dust; and after these visits of inspection and care, the only difference observable was the apparent greying of the black velvet gown. That, however, was only transient, for next day it appeared as glossy and sombre as usual; but in the later hours of that next day's sunlight, seen through the dust-covered windows of the sanctum, many an age had again settled upon his inseparable garment, which, apparently, was rejuvenated by magic each night.

How tenderly that garment was cared for by him it covered daily, year in and year out! How sadly careless did the kind good master seem to be of himself! This solitary man was an epitome of all that is kind, noble, and good, and all that the human idea of silent despair and resignation could picture. Was that skeleton, so tenderly cared for, but an emblem of some phantom hidden away in the closed recesses of his memory? His pupils never knew; but numbers of them would have given all they possessed of endeavour (they possessed little else) to have fathomed the secret and to have assuaged the pain, could they have found means to do it. They all loved Master Heatherley, and were like so many children romping around a benign grandfather. Their little successes were his only joys and their only sorrow was his patient sadness.

Heatherley's was a strange place. Life and death seemed to join hands in that grim studio. The nursery of many famous men, the playground of many idle ones; but the cherished home of all who awakened echoes of mirth, or called for the kindly rebuke of its revered master on his periodical rounds. Visions of many of the great dead and of legions of the successful living can be conjured up by those who remember the old School and its head. They could contribute material for volumes of reminiscences. Alas, how few are living who remember that grim object of solace for Heatherley's holiday. How many have gone to qualify for the like!

Newman Street was once the artists' quarter in London, and Sir

James Linton, P.R.I., remembers hurrying as a student to Heatherley's and seeing old Heatherley leaning out of the window of the school at seven in the morning, looking up and down Newman Street in search of late comers who should have been there an hour earlier, for 6 A.M. was the time that school began!

Amongst famous men who studied there, were Fred Walker, Rossetti, Fred Barnard, Burne-Jones, Millais, Poynter, Phil May, W. L. Wyllie, and countless others.

Samuel Butler, author of *Erewhon*, worked there daily; and Gilbert saw him day by day painting the picture called "Heatherley's Holiday", showing the master engaged in his favourite relaxation, tending the skeleton and dusting the grimy pots. This picture, hung in South Kensington Museum, is remarkable as a study in textures and infinite care and patience. Butler employed the same methods as the Old Masters, scumbling and glazing to get quality into his work. He was then a middle-aged man, a scholar, author, philosopher and musician, with a strong bent and fervent love for art of any description. Gilbert and he found much in common, and the former learnt a good deal of general knowledge from this man of brilliant gifts and sympathy with young people.

"It was only a year altogether that I spent at the R.A. Schools and Heatherley's," says Gilbert. "At the former Arthur Cope was the Adonis who absorbed all the attention of the belles, and there were several. He was a dear fellow, worthy of their adoration; for besides being an Adonis, he was an Admirable Crichton. He married Miss Nichol, and afterwards opened a successful art school with his brother-in-law at South Kensington. He is now Sir Arthur Cope, and though many years have passed since we were boys together, fifty years seem as yesterday; and I cherish nothing but pleasant memories of him and of his brother-in-law, Michael Nichol: both were sons of R.A.'s. Charming Miss Henrietta Rae, afterwards Mrs. Norman, was an irresistible little lady, and one of the students whose wonderful high spirits led her into many a merry scrape and out of one into others: a clever artist. Many romances were nurtured and several artists' daughters married sons of artists; but, oddly enough,

these unions led to little romanticism in art. With the exception of Sims the Keeper, Anning Bell, and one or two other names, little came forth to carry on the Romanticist movement then on foot.

"Lofts was the Custodian, and Ballantyne the Master of Painting. There was no Life School for Sculpture; but after I left there was one large room reserved for it, with thirty students at work. I remember Dicksee and the beautiful Life studies he did; full of innate science, loving care and great respect for traditions. We all had an ideal to emulate Leighton in his aims in Art; Dicksee was the only one at that time able to do so. Very fittingly he occupied the Presidential Chair once held by Leighton. The Academy Schools represented an Athenaeum, where students conversed on matters philosophical and sophistical; whilst Lawrence, Cope and Nichol were great champions of the gladiatorial arts and indulged in pugilism with the gloves as a recreation.

"Miss Mary Gow, sister of Gow the R.A., was another student; an accomplished painter in grisaille and water-colours; a rare character, full of goodness and grace. She lived with her brother for some years, and then married Sidney Hall; her brother only married late in life. Both brother and sister were dear friends, whose memory I cherish."

At the R.A. he met Matthew Ridley Corbett, a painter of great merit, extremely modest about his gifts. When Gilbert left for Paris they parted with equal regret; but they were destined to see each other again later on.

Some notes made whilst a student at the R.A. are remarkable, showing that the crystallised opinions of teachers did not influence him. He went his own way; for he had a definite message to deliver, and, full of youthful prejudices, he was determined to be loyal to his principles. He was told that the figure was all and everything in Art. His reply then was the same as after fifty years as a designer:

"One is amazed how little of the actual figure is necessary. It is the brightening of a composition, a note of exclamation, nothing more. It is a mistake to suppose or take for granted that natural objects which appear symmetrical and having a right and left, are really so.



It is this little variation which gives the mysterious charm in the reality, but causes despair to the artist trying to render it, working, as he invariably does, under the double impression that the actual and mechanical rendering of nature will satisfy the requirements of art. Hence the necessity for interpretation. *Ars est celare artem*—Never forget that the beauty of the diamond is displayed through the skilful cutting of the facets. A work in sculpture is likewise rendered more precious by the judicious and tasteful arrangement of its planes.”

Sir John Gilbert, R.A., when visiting the Royal Academy School, stood a long time in silence before his namesake's rendering of a subject that was set, called “Ambition”, and his fellow-students pushed him forward towards the Master, who praised it very highly indeed and ended by saying “You will go far”—a prophecy Gilbert was to hear again before long. This work, done in competition with other students, had only occasioned derision amongst them, for it was generally known as “The Bride-cake!” Gilbert says: “How hard I strove over that piece of work! It was a curious rendering of a figure, skidding over two recumbent bodies which I named ‘Sloth’ and ‘Ignorance’; for I felt that Ambition obviously has to master and kill these two bad qualities. I was encouraged by Sir John's approbation to go on.” He considers him the finest illustrator of his time, and the best exponent of Shakespeare in pictorial form. He was able, as no other man has done, to get behind Shakespeare's mind and produce, in a dramatic way, those living creatures of flesh and blood that abound in his writings. Next to him in merit as an illustrator he places Doré, a Frenchman recognised by England, but eschewed by his native land.

Alfred Gilbert's first introduction to sculpture was through his father coming in contact with a sculptor named Keyworth and, upon hearing his profession, saying to him, “I have a son who loves sculpture”; to which the other replied, “Bring him to see me”.

When Gilbert went to his studio in Buckingham Palace Road, Keyworth, who was carving lions in hard Portland stone, saw his keen interest and invited him to bring his blouse and chisels as often as he liked. He soon became acquainted with Edward Bowring Stephens,



who lived close by. Stephens was doing a statue of a female figure, and one foot was not being well enough done to satisfy Gilbert. Ever resourceful, he got a cast from his sister's foot in the position Stephens was aiming at, and took it to the artist, who was delighted to make use of it as a model for his work.

But he was most of all impressed and influenced by a really wonderful old man named Lough, whose studio was at the back of Lisson Grove. He produced single figures, often Shakespearean, such as "Puck", with groups and sketches galore from scenes in Shakespeare's plays. His creative invention appealed strongly to his visitor, whose fancy followed a similar line, though it soared into far higher realms. Lough, though a charming old gentleman, was not appreciated by Foley and others, who despised his art and considered him an inferior artist.

Gilbert, from his earliest years, always preferred the company of his elders, and spent many hours with another dear old man, Rogers, the wood-carver, a friend of his father's. His studio was in Maddox Street, where he executed a great amount of beautiful work. Rogers found that his young friend knew something of his craft, having worked with his uncle, who excelled as a wood-carver; but Gilbert saw that this artist far surpassed his father's brother. Indeed, he did not see much superiority in the great Grinling Gibbons's work over that of Rogers, save that the former had a larger vision; but then he had also the advantage of working under Wren, of always doing large work and filling in big spaces, whilst Rogers's work was necessarily on a small scale. In technique Gibbons pierced his work, that is to say, he stuck one piece over another, so that it looked very deeply cut. Rogers carved in one piece of wood only; a far more difficult method. But what does it signify how a thing is done? It is the result only that matters. All means are good to an end. Grinling Gibbons's work is distinguished by its richness; but Gilbert felt that wood was the wrong material to employ for such designs as he used, and that they would have been more suited to beaten metal. Rogers's work was full of erudition and refinement, which in later years Gilbert compared to Leighton's qualities in painting.

Another contemporary of his father's who welcomed him to his studio in Bruton Street was Noble, a fashionable sculptor, who worked for Queen Victoria and the nobility. Whilst there, he used to see a young man busily carving. This same youth introduced himself to him at the R.A. Schools as Mr. Hope Pinker, and was always a good friend during his happy student days. When Gilbert left at the end of a year, Pinker presented him with a set of carving tools made by himself.

There is no doubt that an academic training is of small value to the genius. He only wants to be surrounded by the right environment, his time his own, and the materials within reach. He acquires knowledge in other ways than by rule and precept. By merely watching his elderly friends at work and making his own experiments in their studios, Gilbert gained an early insight into the craftsmanship of many varied materials. These older men saw his promise and sympathised with his desires. They encouraged his ambition to excel in his art, and were more congenial companions than his contemporaries.

The Victorian Era to which he belongs, while a period of mighty reforms and great strides in science, colonising and industrial progress, has been well called a "Dark Age" in Arts and Crafts. With the exception of such names as Stevens and Gilbert in sculpture, Turner in painting, and Morris, Burne-Jones, and Crane in the decorative arts, there was little vitality or originality, and everywhere in sculpture late French Renaissance was considered the standard of taste and copied accordingly. This fashion was brought into vogue by the Prince Consort's predilection for it, and, the demand having arisen, many sculptors slavishly followed it.

Soon after joining Heatherley's, Gilbert wrote to Boehm, the Queen's sculptor, offering his services as apprentice, and received a very cordial letter in reply, engaging him at once. Boehm was away when he went there, and Gilbert found many odd self-appointed duties to do. He even swept out the studios. On the first morning of Boehm's return he saw his apprentice tidying up the entrance to his stable with a broom. He sent for him and said: "Why are you

working like this? It is not necessary or fitting. Your letter was a very unusual one, showing your scholarship and originality, and a capacity for better things than menial work. I intend to teach you all I know." Gilbert thanked him and said the things wanted doing, so he thought it was his duty to do them; in fact, that it was his business as an apprentice.

Boehm, who had entertained other ideas for him from the first reading of his letter, now invited him to come to his studio, and gave him a bust of Gluck by Houdin to copy, which when finished roused his enthusiasm and praise. He then showed him small wood carvings and began at once to teach him. He gave him a little figure to begin with, and when Gilbert showed him his work, he said, "I can't touch this. I don't know how to go on with it. How comes it that you, a schoolboy, have so much knowledge of form and expression?" To which Gilbert said that he had been dabbling in clay at intervals since he was young, and he worked by the "light of nature"—a strange answer, that caused his master to pause and reflect.

As Boehm said he could not finish the figure in the nude, he draped it, and finished it. That day Edward Lanteri, who was working for Boehm, was introduced, and never afterwards failed in his devotion to his junior friend. Lanteri himself told me of this first meeting. Gilbert, a mere lad, was at work on a figure which was surprisingly beautiful, and Lanteri took Boehm aside and said: "This is the coming man". Then he added reflectively: "Gilbert writes to me always as his 'dear Master'. That is absurd, I never taught him anything. It was all there from the first. But I learnt many things from him!"

The apprentice was soon to learn the art of pointing. An equestrian statue of "King Tom", the famous Derby winner, was being made in the studio, and Boehm, who seemed most anxious to hurry his young friend on to learn everything, asked Lanteri, "Don't you think Gilbert can do this under Glasby?" (another assistant he had). To which Lanteri heartily agreed. His next task was helping Glasby to build up by the system of pointing a rearing thoroughbred for the Duke of Westminster, as a companion to a rearing Clydesdale





HEAD OF A GIRL.  
Bronze bust, 1882.



HEAD OF AN OLD MAN.  
Bronze bust, 1883.

Exhibited Royal Academy, 1884. *Pages 57-58.*

*Photos. Hollier*



stallion Boehm had made. When this was done, the same model was most ingeniously adapted by Boehm for another equestrian statue, 'St. George and the Dragon', which is now in Australia.

Boehm often took the young artist to his private studio and talked to him about his future. It was not long before he said: "You are not doing any good to yourself by being here. You must go to Paris to study in real earnest. You should now be at the Beaux Arts." Later he said, "You must go to Rome".

At times he would unbosom himself and speak regretfully of himself and his own art. "I started life full of ideals and aspirations," he said. "But I soon found it was impossible to carry them out in England. Everything was against my doing so, or even making a living at sculpture. I found I must have capital to enable me to live; I determined to do this first, and saw the opportunity before me in numbers of commissions for busts, in fact, portraits of people. I made an equestrian statuette of a lady that became the rage. Everyone wanted to have a similar work, and they could not be produced fast enough. In becoming the fashion the sculptor remains the slave to it. I concentrated on the commercial side and stayed there making plenty of money; but this art is not art as I once conceived it. Having forsaken my ideals, inspiration has forsaken me!" All of which was perfectly apparent to his pupil, who never had the slightest temptation to follow his example. He felt sorry for his master notwithstanding, and his determination was only strengthened by Boehm's advice, which was always "Follow the highest, for you can succeed where I have failed".

Boehm had a large soul. He once said, after looking at his friend's work, "I suppose men would say you are my rival. That is all nonsense, there is no rival in art to me. You have outstepped me already; but I don't fear you." And, laughing, "As for money, you will never outrival me in that, for you have a soul above mundane things".

Gilbert learnt much whilst there, and his reverence for the man and artist was great. He says, "Boehm was a native of Hungary, a handsome, unaffected, polished gentleman, full of humour and

dignity. A born actor, a very sincere friend, and an accomplished man of the world. Fully aware of his limitations in art, he knew equally well that his forte lay in his keen power of observation, and readiness to seize on peculiarity of character or deportment in his sitters: thus his success in portraiture. His rapidity of work not only interested his sitters, but was accompanied by a flow of eloquent and witty conversation which made him an attractive personality."

With such gifts he could not fail to be welcome in clubland. He belonged to the Athenaeum, the Gridiron, and the Garrick. In this way he came across many people who were attracted to the man, and a great deal of his time had necessarily to be wasted over mere social functions, which are fatal to productive work. Royalties and many celebrities came to his studio, where Gilbert was instructed to take charge of affairs if Boehm happened to be out. The Marquis of Dufferin, one of the most charming and courtly of men, sat for his bust, which Boehm executed with lightning rapidity in two hours.

Herbert Spencer, who had a portrait bust of himself done, was one of the ugliest old fellows imaginable. Yet he attracted the fair sex. One day he arrived at the studio wearing black kid gloves out at the ends, and a bevy of admiring ladies, antique and comic, revolved round their hero in rapt admiration.

Carlyle was also a frequent visitor. The first time he came Boehm was out and, as his pupil had orders to admit no one, he prevented Carlyle from crossing the threshold. The sage, amazed and angry, strongly resented this, and gave his name as though it meant "Open Sesame"; but Gilbert was firm and saw the old man depart. Carlyle, however, bore him no grudge; he even seemed inwardly to approve of his action, for he remarked to Boehm afterwards, "That's a very zealous young man, he'll go far"—the same words that Sir John Gilbert had used.

After this episode Carlyle often called and was always admitted, and he became very friendly with "the zealous young man". He always became mesmerised by two busts which stood one on each side of the entrance to Boehm's private studio. They were portraits of Ruskin and Millais. The shaggy-looking old fellow would meander

round them, peering first into one face, and then into the other, then retreating, would gaze and gaze from a distance, ejaculating "He—ha—hum!" and "Hoity-toity-toity!" several times, shaking his head sadly before taking his departure. He never divulged his thoughts, but his manner suggested meditations on the frailties of mankind, and of unhappy matrimonial experiences, which perhaps included his own Jane's shortcomings.

One day Gilbert encountered a chapter of accidents. He had been asked by Boehm always to cover up Ruskin's portrait before admitting Millais, and vice versa. When he knew Ruskin was coming by appointment that morning to see Boehm, he by mistake draped the wrong one, so that, as Ruskin went past into Boehm's studio, he saw his rival's portrait looking at him and his own effigy effaced. He noticed it, but said nothing. As soon as the door closed on him, Gilbert uncovered Ruskin, and threw the drapery over Millais's bust. No sooner had he done this than Millais suddenly bounced in. The first question he asked was "Why is my bust covered up?" Meanwhile he noted with a frown that Ruskin's portrait was in full evidence; and this put him into a bad temper at once.

Gilbert's reply that a mistake had been made was literally true—and he uncovered it as he spoke. Millais then asked to see Boehm, and, disappointed at being told he was engaged, seemed determined to find out who was the visitor. He asked so many questions that at last his listener lost all patience and said outright "Mr. Ruskin". It acted like a bombshell upon Millais, who made use of a very strong expletive and vanished. Thereupon, for the second time in a few minutes, the covering was carefully wrapt round his portrait till Ruskin had taken his departure, when both busts were exposed to view.

When Carlyle died, Boehm came to Gilbert and asked him to go to Cheyne Row to take his death-mask. So he set forth accompanied by a German worker, who thoroughly understood his business. But he found that those in charge at Carlyle's house were most indignant, and refused to allow the mask to be taken. Though Gilbert produced a letter from Boehm, they still refused and sent for a policeman.

Gilbert and his helper had got upstairs and had no intention of returning without accomplishing their task. Gilbert set to work, made the mask most expeditiously, and passed it quickly through the door to his assistant, who got away with it, leaving his master to face the storm of disapprobation that raged before the guardian of the law appeared. But the latter, having heard both sides, said, "It seems to me this gentleman is within his rights, and you can't prevent him from doing what he asks". The mask is now in the possession of its maker.

It was unfortunate that he was prevented from immortalising the great Brahms in plastic form. It had been arranged that he was to go to Vienna to do it, and his luggage and servant were in readiness, when a telegram came that the composer had died suddenly, too late to obtain his death-mask.

Boehm was often asked to do posthumous portraits. One day he received a number of photographs with a commission to immortalise a young lady who had died. He quickly built up a bust of her, and the widower called soon after to see it. Clad in the deepest mourning, was there ever such an embodiment of woe as this man whose whole countenance betrayed his grief at his loss? Boehm went forward to meet him, and in his genial way led him to a chair, talking all the time in an endeavour to assuage the mourner's agitation. "I have done the bust," he said, "and I hope you will think it is a good likeness. I want you to tell me candidly your opinion, and if there is anything you wish altered I shall be delighted to do it." He then removed the drapery which surrounded his work. As he did so, he glanced at the big cheval-glass which reflected the widower's face, so that he could judge for himself what the man thought of the likeness. He saw at once that this knight of the rueful countenance was only bitterly disappointed. His expression was more lugubrious than ever. "No—no," he murmured sadly, "that's not my wife." Then in a whisper, "That's not my 'Mousey'."

Boehm was puzzled. It was exactly like the photographs he had consulted. What was it that was lacking? His sharp ears had caught the strange name of "Mousey". He conquered a wild inclination to

laugh, and assuming a gravity he was far from feeling asked his visitor if he could give him an idea what the work lacked that it did not satisfy him. The poor man shed tears and only murmured "Mousey". Boehm terminated the interview by saying cheerfully, "Come back to-morrow at four o'clock, leave it to me, and I think you will be pleased with the likeness".

Accordingly the man rose and shambled away, as Gilbert appeared to hear the verdict. Boehm related the story, then said reflectively: "A brilliant idea occurred to me, of which I intend to make use. Come in presently, and have a look at the bust again."

When Gilbert returned, he gazed at the bust, then burst out laughing—

"Well," said Boehm anxiously, "what is your opinion?"

"That you have made it a cross between a mouse and a rat," he replied.

"That was my intention," said Boehm. "My dear fellow, directly I caught the name I began to think there must have been some analogy between such a preposterous name and the person it was given to. There is no doubt in my mind that she resembled a mouse. I am curious to know if I am right. We shall see when he comes."

When the widower appeared next day he was greeted cordially by Boehm and led to the same seat. As the bust was uncovered, Boehm looked quickly into the mirror. He saw to his satisfaction the man's start of surprise, followed by a smile of pleasure. "That's 'Mousey'," he cried. And he was so delighted that he ordered two replicas of it.

Amongst others who visited Boehm in his studio were Sir John Fox Burgoyne, Lord Shaftesbury, Henry Cole, and the Duke and Duchess of Bedford. Sir John Fox Burgoyne, the great Field-Marshal, sat for Boehm's statue of him now in Waterloo Place, near the Duke of York's column. Gilbert had modelled a little group of St. George and the Dragon, which Boehm liked so greatly that he used it for the head of the baton.

Lord Shaftesbury's face and figure were well known to the public,



and the man himself greatly esteemed for his philanthropy. Boehm very quickly made a life-like presentment of his rugged spiritual face, in a bust which his assistant little dreamed would one day cause him great anguish of spirit.

Henry Cole, Director of the South Kensington Museum, was the great organiser who helped to build the Albert Hall.

When the Duchess of Bedford came to the studio, smoking was forbidden; but it went on all the same, the fumes being dedicated to the clay-box. The Duke of Bedford, who accompanied her, was mainly distinguished for wearing black kid gloves like an undertaker.

The great cheval-glass in the studio after Boehm's death passed into Gilbert's possession, when he took his friend's studio in "The Avenue". Boehm had this glass beside him and looked into it as he modelled. His sitters, especially ladies, sat before it, and he found it amused them to gaze at themselves. Gilbert used often to think, if that glass could speak, what tales it could tell!

The fine statue of Sir Walter Raleigh now at Falmouth was executed by Boehm and Gilbert, his assistant, who when he helped to build it up was unconscious of the fact that he was actually a descendant of the great Raleigh, or at least of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, his half-brother.

Whilst at Heatherley's and the R.A. School, Gilbert was at the age when dancing ought to have appealed to him. But it is certain he would never have made himself proficient in the art by taking lessons if his cousin and fiancée, Miss Alice Gilbert, had not only been an expert dancer, but so extremely fond of it that she was always in much request in the ballroom, where her great beauty and grace charmed everybody.

Now just over the way from Heatherley's was a famous school for dancing and deportment, where Mr. and Mrs. Henderson and their daughter, Robertine, taught stately measures to the youth of London. Mr. Henderson was actually the original of Dickens's famous character Mr. Turvydrop, but he was a more dignified edition and really had all the airs and graces that individual aimed at.

Dancing and deportment were taken very seriously in mid-Victorian times. Gilbert learnt the fashionable *trois-temps* waltz to the monotonous chant "Glide-point-turn", and he used to dance with Miss Robertine Henderson until he got so expert that one evening he led her out and in three strides took her round the room! "You are getting on," said the young lady encouragingly, but withal satirically. Meanwhile, the old Professor of Deportment had witnessed it, tapped his violin, and said, "My dear young Sir, in the ballroom seemly and dignified deportment is essential in polite and refined circles". "A quiet rebuke," said Gilbert, "as I was turning it into a bear-garden."

Very thorough was the advice given in those days. A gentleman must carry two pairs of white kid gloves, he must have the right hand always gloved and carry the left-hand glove. It was not considered right to dance even two dances in succession, and after every dance the lady was taken back to Mamma, when her cavalier bowed gracefully and retired. Poor Mamma! How she victimised herself on the altar of duty as she sat amongst the British matrons, smiling, but rigidly observing any departure from the accepted etiquette!

"How to enter a room" and "How to approach a hostess" were taught in those days, and even "How to write Love-Letters!" "My dear young friend," Henderson would say to some pupil, "keep your eyes front, above your partner's shoulder." Again, "It is not for you to pick up her glove if she drops it, but for the cavalier who follows, who has to ask your permission to present it". "If your partner has an accident to her dress or hair, on no account offer to button her glove or lace her sandal. Lead her away to the side, when she dissembles the accident!" Fifty years ago etiquette was taught carefully to divide the common people from the upper classes. Compare the casual manner and the dances of to-day, and it will be seen how much Society has lost, not gained.

The Heatherley Costume Ball is an institution that has been held annually for eighty years, with the exception of the War years, at the School; but times have changed, and it has been celebrated elsewhere of late years. If the spirits of those who have departed

were permitted to revisit former scenes of triumphs, what changes they would witness. Yet Life flows on, and fundamentally Youth is eternally the same.

This year of Gilbert's life, so crowded with work and real enjoyment in his work, was one of the greatest importance to his future, and marked only sunny hours. Of his own will he was soon to assume grave responsibilities, in which he would encounter the sheer struggle for existence.



*Photo. Hollyer*

ICARUS.

Bronze statuette, 1884. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1884. *Pages 62-66.*







## CHAPTER IV

### LIFE AT THE BEAUX ARTS



HE time had now arrived when the influences shaping his career speeded Gilbert's departure to Paris. There were several reasons, one being Boehm's advice and another Lanteri's. The latter had received his training at the Beaux Arts, where he only just failed to gain the Prix de Rome, being second in the competition. He would have stayed on, and entered again; but he was married, and a very good appointment was offered to him at South Kensington, under Dalou, to whom he had been assistant in Paris. This he accepted. He now helped Gilbert, through his knowledge of the Beaux Arts, to go there, and introduced him to several people who would be useful to him, coming as a stranger to a foreign land. Gilbert was delighted at the prospects it opened out to him, but he could not bear the idea of going alone. So, at the age of twenty-one, he married his cousin, Alice Gilbert, who was twenty-eight, and they left for Paris, where he intended qualifying as a sculptor. His marriage was a secret one, for both knew their parents would never give their consent. Indeed, it appeared a rash act to everyone. Notwithstanding poverty and a good many other hardships, it proved a happy union, for they were young, and youth counts such things lightly.

On their arrival Gilbert entered the Beaux Arts for his studies and at the same time took pupils in Latin and Greek, and did works of sculpture which he managed to sell, whilst his wife, who was an accomplished linguist, gave lessons in modern languages; and thus working together they just managed to live out of debt. Gilbert looks back upon those early years of struggle as part of the real summer of his life. There are memories of walks taken in the evenings, when, work being ended, his wife would bring some educative book and read aloud to him, as they sat on the banks beside the Seine. Extremely cultured and clever, she taught him to speak

French, German, and Italian. There was no time for any amusements beyond these quiet hours together. Social life was beyond their means; but neither of them cared for society, and certainly had no regrets on that score. Every minute was occupied, and they were quite happy.

Gilbert's parents were naturally very much annoyed at the marriage. They were passing through a very great sorrow and anxiety over their younger son's grave illness. Gilbert went home for a time to share their vigils; but he knew directly he saw his beloved brother that the end was not far off. After his brother's death his parents came to Paris, where they stayed some time. His father was never the same man again; his health and spirits declined greatly.

Meanwhile Gilbert was working almost beyond human strength. His eldest son was born, and for the first year of his life it seemed impossible that he could survive. His wife was always extremely delicate, and the young husband and father had the whole care of the home thrust upon his efforts, in addition to his studies and his responsibilities as bread-winner. He learnt to do many domestic duties during that strenuous time, even to cooking the daily meals, and doing the marketing. When he returned from the Beaux Arts of a morning he would dispense the soup he had carefully made before he set out for his studies; then he did the many odd tasks connected with the home before starting his work again in the afternoon, whether teaching, or producing art for sale, or further studying at the Beaux Arts, or continuing his work at a hospital in Paris. At seven o'clock in the evening he attended another school, the "Gobelin", for life studies and other subjects bearing upon his work. He had half an hour's walk to get to either of his schools, and when he returned to his home he often spent sleepless, anxious nights with the sick child, who cried continually during that first year of his life.

He was not long in establishing his reputation as an artist at the Beaux Arts, though when Cavalier, his master, first saw him he was anything but interested in his new pupil, and greeted his first efforts with the opinion that he would be better engaged in making boots—a piece of satirical advice that failed to depress his ambitious pupil,

who only determined to wring a different verdict from his surly master.

After three months at the school, the subject set for the students was called "Moses in the Bulrushes", and Gilbert's rendering of it not only caused a complete change in Cavalier's attitude towards him, but set several of the leading artists in Paris thinking furiously. Cavalier watched Gilbert very carefully after this and predicted great things for him. He soon gained the "Place du Concord", but, oddly enough, it was not won by his modelling, but by his thorough knowledge of the science of his art, for perspective, drawing, geometry—atomy, and history. When he finally made a sketch for his "Kiss of Victory", Cavalier, after examining it critically, was brought to tears. He broke down, then mounting on a box—he was a very small man—he drew his pupil towards him, and kissed him on the forehead.

Gilbert, somewhat amazed at this reception, asked him: "Shall I go to Rome?" "Yes," he replied very enthusiastically, "go to Rome and carry out your sketch."

"It was the first time he had been so kind to me," said Gilbert, "and I could not help contrasting his early reception and his withering advice that I should give up art to make boots." However, a long time intervened before circumstances allowed the artist to leave Paris and carry out this work in Rome.

I have said that Gilbert works entirely by suggestion, hence the indefinable spiritual quality he succeeds in giving unconsciously to his work. "The Kiss of Victory" was the outcome of a dream. After three years in Paris he was unable even to go and see the Salon; he had not the money to pay for the entrance. A friend told him of a group there by Doré called "Le Baiser de la Gloire" (The Kiss of Glory). The title attracted Gilbert's fancy, and he could not get it out of his head till he had made a sketch of his own conception of the subject. That night he dreamt that he had seen Doré's rendering—and when he awoke he went to touch up his sketch from the point of view of his dream. On the next day he went to the Salon, and found it was entirely different from his own conception, and he

made up his mind to carry out his idea, which ended in being called "The Kiss of Victory". In Doré's "Kiss of Glory" the chief figure was the familiar one of a French soldier with his chassepot.

The students at the Beaux Arts used to make a perfectly literal copy of the model, and anyone daring enough to employ the imaginative qualities, thus getting an interpretation of the subject, was spoken of with disdain. They used the word *chic* as a term of opprobrium, and when they said of a student that he worked *de chic*, they considered that there was nothing more to be said about his methods.

Frémiet, the master, insisted upon proportions being accurately measured, and anatomy well expressed. Mercier, on the contrary, aimed at the summing up of the salient points of the model, rather than a photographic presentment. One of the most valuable things of the teaching at the Beaux Arts was the thorough training of the memory. The student was set to work from the model, and often told to go out of the room, and to work on the whole figure from the mental notes he had gained when studying the model. Gradually he learnt to take in all the essentials of form, and to know them by heart, in a way he could never have done if he had not practised this excellent system (about which I find Butler in his "Notes" say something). Another exercise was working from the living model posed in a similar position to some antique figure. After working from the former, the student made a study of the latter; and by this means was able to form a comparison between the standard of beauty established by the ancient Greeks, and to look for, and endow the study made from the living model with these attributes essential to a perfect figure. Perfection was a quality they aimed at, and the beautiful in Art was always sought for and prized.

Competitions went on all the time, spurring the student on to fresh efforts. If successful, what happiness! If unsuccessful in obtaining high marks, how he strove the next time to remedy it and soar upwards! A splendid training this, set by a master who knew the students' temperaments. There was no such system as this in English art schools at that time, nor until many years after. Sir Edward Poynter studied in Paris, and often said that the French methods of



teaching art in those days were beyond comparison with any nation. This does not apply to the present day, when every facility for learning can be found in London. That this change came to pass was largely due to the untiring efforts of two unselfish masters in sculpture, both Frenchmen: Dalou and Lanteri.

Yet whilst Gilbert was gaining in knowledge and dexterity every day, he confesses that his art training in France was a disappointment to him. This was not the fault of the system, but owing to the temperament of this individual pupil. A man of his peculiar calibre only finds academic training irksome. Genius requires the materials near him, and the facilities to work and develop his mentality. Competition helps him to concentrate, and emulation is valuable, but he has within him his own way, and a better way for doing everything than his teachers can show him. So he is best left alone.

He speaks with the greatest admiration of France, and her wonderful generosity towards artists in fostering the true spirit of art, and providing an excellent training for students, free of all cost to themselves. France has led the way for many years in this direction; but other countries have not yet learnt to follow her example. The two great masters of sculpture in England owed their training to France.

Some amusing recollections of Gilbert's student days come back to him. Tom Lee's parents came to Paris to see their son, and, bent upon giving him pleasure, arranged a grand dinner at the Meurice Hotel, where they were staying, to which Gilbert and his wife were specially invited. Mrs. Gilbert could not leave her young children; and Gilbert declined, confessing the reason to his friend that he had not got a dress suit. Lee, greatly disappointed, cogitated, and hit upon a unique plan. Gilbert must wear his evening suit, and after putting in an appearance at the dinner, leave early, so that he, too, could come in late for the feast. Gilbert demurred and expostulated at this "Box and Cox" arrangement, but his good nature made him agree when his friend pleaded his parents had set their hearts on this entertainment, and would feel greatly hurt if he did not come.

The evening arrived, and Gilbert, at his friend's rooms, manfully



struggled into the suit which was much too small for him; then set off for the Meurice, arriving early. He was greeted warmly by the kindly host and hostess, whom he asked to excuse his leaving early, as he was obliged to keep a certain appointment elsewhere. They graciously agreed, whilst expressing their regret. Then followed a magnificent banquet; but before sitting down Mrs. Lee looked round and asked "Where can Tom be?" Where, indeed! His friend in borrowed garments was literally on tenterhooks all the time as course succeeded course, and every now and then came the plaintive, rather worried maternal note, "Where is Tom?"

Alas, Gilbert knew only too well! Tom was anxiously awaiting him, and could never make an appearance until he disappeared.

Watching his opportunity, he slipped away under the cover of general conversation and hurried to Tom's rooms to restore his property. When he arrived Tom had disappeared, leaving no traces. At first his friend surmised that he had gone to the Meurice in his everyday suit, tired of waiting. So he went home, and the first person he met was Lee, who had misunderstood the last rendering of the farce, thinking they were to meet at Gilbert's room. "All's well that ends well," said Gilbert, in high good humour at getting rid of the crablike shell that encased him.

Lee laughingly slipped into the garments and posted off with all possible speed, arriving about nine o'clock, long before the interminable banquet ended. What excuse he made for his absence was never known; but his parents, who idolised him, were overjoyed to see him at last. The two conspirators in this little comedy often chuckled over it afterwards.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Lee left, their son arranged with a friend, Dr. Fallon, to give a little dinner in their honour at his studio. Gilbert's mother was staying in Paris and was invited, also a whole family of girls, with their widowed mother. One of the daughters was irreverently named "Steel Filings" on account of a certain tartness of manner, and though she was always ready to take people to task for their shortcomings, she was not unpopular with her friends.

The night arrived and all assembled at the studio dressed in their

best; Lee's mother being as magnificent as usual, to lend a tone to the Bohemian affair. Lee, who did not appear to have made due preparations for the banquet beforehand, busied himself making the lobster salad in a washing hand-basin, whilst Fallon arranged some empty sardine tins, which he filled with dessert. Meanwhile "Steel Filings" eyed every move with attention, and disconcerted her young host by inquiring where everything came from, till he blushed to the roots of his hair. The lobster salad was declined by Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Gilbert, and the rest of the guests followed suit; but Lee and Gilbert were hungry, and having no scruples ate it up with enjoyment.

It was traditional in the Gilbert family to garner and attach people to them as they went through life. "Steel Filings" and her family were attracted to them, and the whole party renewed their acquaintance with them later in Rome. One of the sisters, being devoted to children, asked if she might become their governess. She followed them to England, became a member of the family, and proved their most loyal and devoted friend for many years.

Amongst his artist friends, the two whose lives were most intimately interwoven with his were Tom Lee and Edward Lanteri.

Of Lee he has recorded: "He was wittily boisterous, spiritual morally, material in human affairs. Tentative by nature, unskilful through lack of, or imperfect, training. His scholastic training was at Westminster School. His art training at Carey's Art School, and as a private pupil of Philip, an English sculptor. After four years in Rome he returned to London to commence his career independently, in the studio of his old master Philip (deceased), where he executed his first important Liverpool Town Hall exterior decorations, or rather part of them; for he was never permitted to finish the entire scheme. This broke his spirit if not his heart. Everyone loved and respected him."

Of Lanteri he says: "Silently witty. Spiritual in the French sense. Material in view of human nature. Dexterous, naturally. Skilful by training. His scholastic training was very slight. His art training was at the Beaux Arts, and experience gained through

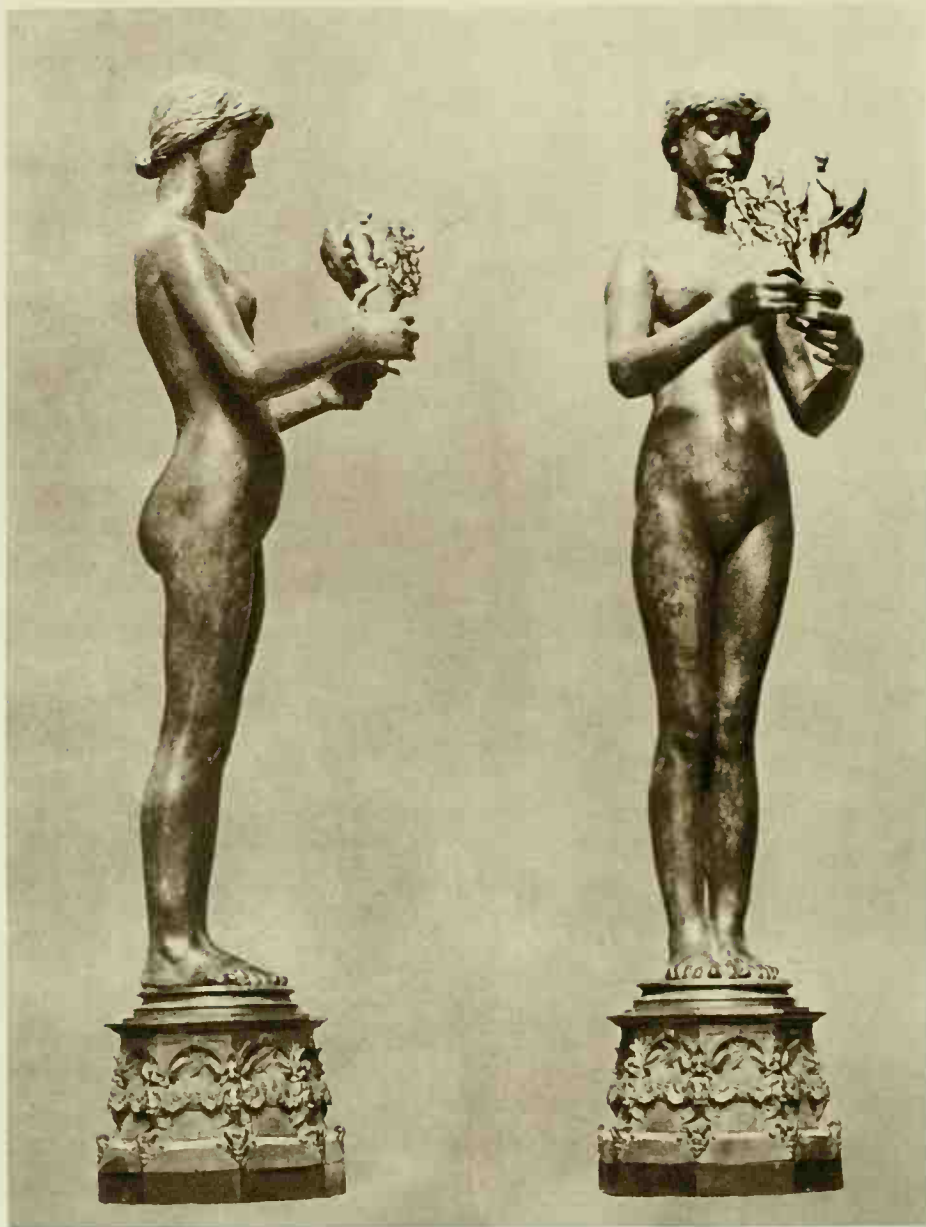
working for others. Unambitious of all pertaining to worldly advantages and personal interests; chivalrous, generous, magnanimous, unselfish, loyal, devoted, enthusiastic. He came to London as assistant to Boehm, and periodically to Dalou, whom he succeeded as Professor of Modelling at South Kensington, where, renouncing all personal interests, he continued to his death and acquired a brilliant reputation as an unrivalled teacher and the love of all who knew him."

Both men died within a short space of time of each other, in 1916 and 1917, their ages differing very slightly. Lanteri was under twenty-five years of age when he commenced his career in London. Lee was somewhere about twenty-five when he left London as a student, for Rome, where his professional career may have said to have begun, and was with Gilbert in Paris almost up to the time of the latter's leaving for Rome in 1878; and he remained with him in Rome for two years. Gilbert says:

"I have always regarded these two men's lives as having been very intimately connected with my own between the period of my early student days and my return from Rome in 1885. Their approval of my every effort was certainly paramount in my innermost desire, not only during that time, but to that of their deaths. Lanteri I looked upon as my artistic guide and early benefactor, my instigator to strive in affectionate and grateful recognition. Lee as my moral example and support, my incentive to produce in friendly rivalry. The desire for the approval of both has ever been foremost in my mind, in all my undertakings, as their memory will continue to guide me to honouring it to the day of my death."

All the time that the Gilberts were in Paris, they were obliged to practise self-abnegation to a great degree. With a delicate wife and two children the task became greater as time passed on; and, no matter how hard the young husband worked, it was impossible to earn a larger income under the circumstances. He was obliged to give a considerable part of his time to qualifying for his future profession. Hence the one room to live in was all they could manage. This room, with a brick floor, contained a bed, one chair, some





*Photos. Hollier*

AN OFFERING TO HYMEN.  
Bronze statuette, 1884. *Pages 144-145.*



packing cases that were used as tables and seats alternately, and two babies; the latter being their only valuable possessions. Into this abode one afternoon a well-intentioned, but hopelessly tactless, pair of plutocrats penetrated, their intention being to make a formal call. After rapping at the door and asking "May we come in?" they came.

What a picture this visit would make as "A Study in Contrasts". The lady wore a very gorgeous silk dress with a train, which she had gathered up in traversing the squalid stairs and passage leading to their room, and she now let it down. "The floor is quite clean," she was gravely assured by her hostess, if satirically. "O yes, of course," she said hurriedly. "Very nice, very nice." But the sight of poverty evidently made her ill at ease. Meantime her husband, richly appavelled, wandered about the room, took up a book, looked at it—and put it down again. He left a sovereign under the book, which was found later.

It was a strained situation, and only the fact that the visitors meant well saved the impossible situation. They had been poor in their youth, but had acquired great wealth in their later years, and they were actually afraid of poverty. Lacking the early advantage of education and gentle associations, they did not know how to ignore what they had once endured themselves, and they said and did the wrong things until both became tongue-tied. It would be difficult to say which were the most relieved when they departed. When the gold coin was shown to Gilbert, he asked quizzically, "Would you not like me to make you a chain to hang it on, as a memento of this visit?" Instead, they decided to put it to a more practical use.

John Swan, R.A., the animal sculptor, worked with Gilbert in Paris, and they often made studies from the animals in the Zoo. Swan was some years his senior, and had been at the Beaux Arts under Frémiet, when he had worked at figures. Gilbert, on the contrary, came from Boehm, where he had been specialising in animals. Swan, seeing him producing the latter, was fired by his example to do the same and confessed to his predilection for them. After a while he came to Gilbert and asked him to make a compact

not to do any animals, but figures—whilst he would forsake his late occupation and specialise in animals. Gilbert did not see his line of reasoning, but nevertheless consented to this plan, greatly to Frémiet's concern. Thus the two students changed their plans for a time.

When Gilbert returned to England he found Swan had broken his compact, and was producing figures and portraits. He therefore rescinded his agreement. Mrs. Swan was a clever artist, and they had two children, Mary, and a son who was named Barrie after the French animal painter. Swan died suddenly from ptomaine poisoning, after eating canned food.

Dr. Fallon also met with an untimely end. He studied at the Beaux Arts to become a sculptor to please his father, but very soon realising that he had no real ability for art, he seceded from it, and entered the medical profession, working at Charing Cross Hospital. He then had a London practice, but his career was destined to be a brief one. After operating on a patient he contracted blood-poisoning and died in twelve hours, a martyr to science. In character, wise, gentle, and infinitely kind, he was a great friend of Gilbert's.

## CHAPTER V

### ITALY



COMING to Italy with a delicate wife and his two small children, George and Mary, Gilbert would have found a stopping journey more practicable than travelling from Paris to Rome almost without a break. He had very little money in hand; but although he had planned to go right through, he decided, when nearing Turin, that it would be impossible to proceed farther without giving his precious charges a night's rest in an hotel. The next day they went towards the Eternal City. The artist's heart beat quicker, and his whole being was filled with delight at actually finding himself in Rome a few hours later. But his satisfaction received a check, and his hopes were temporarily dashed to the ground, when he and his wife discovered that they had been skilfully robbed of all their money; and later on he found that the sketches and drawings, the whole work of his three years in Paris, had been abstracted, presumably at the same time.

It was a bleak November night in 1878, with a steady downpour of rain. The whole party were worn out with fatigue and so depressed at the loss of their all that little will-power remained to combat this catastrophe. But the innate love of adventure came to the aid of the youthful head of the family, and, backed by a sense of humour, inspired him with a daring plan. Having collected the luggage, as he thought, in its entirety, he ordered a porter to take it to the exit from the station where all the hotel omnibuses were drawn up. Here he spied in front of the door of exit a pretentious-looking vehicle with its end turned to the curb, bearing the name of the Hotel Aliberte. This name, with the appearance of the vehicle, convinced him that it must be a house of some importance. He therefore assumed an air common to foreigners of opulence, as he handed in his charges to the interior, then with a loftiness suited

to the dramatic impersonation, ordered the hotel porter to see to the charging of his luggage on the top. As no other passengers were bound for the *Aliberte*, the lumbering omnibus drew away to its destination.

The night was dark, the streets ill-lighted, and little was visible of the part of the city they traversed till they arrived at a little street at the beginning of the *Via Margutta*. The bus drew up before an imposing doorway, through which a fairly large hall, brilliantly lighted, could be seen. In the middle stood a sleek embodiment of Mr. Mantilini, who appeared to condescend to come towards the new arrivals with a patronising air of welcome. But that sort of demeanour was not likely to get the better of Gilbert, who saw through it and promptly rose to the occasion by assuming an even more imperious manner, tempered with great condescension.

"We shall require," he said, "a double-bedded room with a child's cot and a second smaller room for a nurse and the other of our two children. We have not brought a maid, and this is what we shall ask you to find for us during our stay in your hotel."

By this time the landlord's hands had become quite humid through continual imaginary washing, and his face beamed. He resembled a sunny day in April, instead of the landlord of a depressing hotel.

"Your Excellence desires refreshment, no doubt, and I place myself at his orders," he said.

"I shall require a light supper served in my room," said Gilbert grandly, "a little soup, followed by fish, then a roast or boiled capon, the customary dessert and a flask of your best wine. No French wine," he added warningly, "but pure Italian wine."

The obsequious host summoned a chambermaid, who took possession of the party, and, preceded by a man with a lighted candle in each hand, the procession was escorted to a room on the first floor. The opening of the door wafted out a whole flight of strange pieces of paper, uncommonly like the shaving-papers of the last occupant, which settled upon the newcomers like a flock of evil birds and completely destroyed the impressive solemnity of the

ceremony, whilst a draught of air extinguished both candles and left them in darkness. Out of the darkness there came the audible sound of "Madonna—O per Baccho!" and further words from the candle-bearer, which were later recognised as common phrases from a certain class of Italians, in the nature of swearing. This strange medley of classic invective, mixed with that of religious exclamation and invocation, became a matter for reflection and comment. Whether it was owing to the Madonna or Father Bacchus that the room turned out to be comfortable remained an enigma!

Scarcely had they settled in these quarters, with the room lighted up by the candle-bearer, when they were joined by the proprietor, leading a curious homely woman, and introducing her as a *buona raggonza*, which means a "good sort". This was a flattering exaggeration as applied to her. She proved a most undesirable person, a low-class German, and a bigoted pilgrim, who had come on foot from her country. However, under the eye of the proprietor she fulfilled her duties well enough during their stay there. The mistake they made was in taking her to their rooms later.

The next morning Gilbert sought the British consul, who was most sympathetic on learning of his difficulties, and lent him all the money he required whilst waiting to hear from his father, to whom he had cabled. In a short time his parent sent him a cheque which more than covered his monetary losses. It was then they discovered that a thief had been busy amongst the luggage and had whisked away some very important boxes, including valuable documents that were never recovered.

Gilbert soon found a studio and began to work. A writer of that time has left the following record of his impressions concerning the artist. "Mr. Alfred Gilbert", he said, "is a very young man, and, being a very modest one, considers himself as merely entering upon the threshold of the Temple of Art.

"Mr. Beaumont, being able to see the promise the young artist had to show, commissioned him to make a group, leaving him untrammelled in his choice of a subject. And now in his studio in the



Vicola del Ventaggio, close to the Passaggiato di Ripetta, with Tiber's yellow flood rolling within sight from his doorstep, Mr. Gilbert is labouring at his creation from rosy morn to dewy eve, *con amore*, with all that concentrated and believing passion with which a young poet-artist worships his first ideal work. The subject is an ambitious one: 'The Kiss of Victory'.

"A youthful warrior, armed after the fashion of a Roman legionary, has received a mortal wound in battle, and is sinking back into the arms of the Genius of Victory who, while supporting his fainting form, bends her head to imprint a kiss on his brow. The wings of the Genius slightly curving forward, seem as though about to close in protection around the dying limbs. . . . The conception is a very highly poetical one, which requires to be treated in a manner as little marked by the prevailing realism of the day as may be. The dying figure struck me as remarkably good. . . .

"I found in Mr. Gilbert's studio a terra-cotta design for a tomb, which could not fail to attract attention. A classical sarcophagus-shaped tomb, with a single figure sitting upon it. The drapery is such as might be that of a monk or nun, with a large cowl very much drawn over the head, and the figure is slightly stooping, for the purpose of writing with a stilus on the top of the sarcophagus. Nothing can apparently be more simple. Nor is it possible to give in words any adequate account of the effect which is produced on the mind of the spectator."

When, after some months, "The Kiss of Victory" was near completion, his wife became so seriously ill that the doctor advised her immediate departure from Rome. Gilbert took her with the two children to Capri, and having established them in a house returned to Rome. Alas, an unexpected misfortune awaited him. His studio had been flooded, and his work had gone back to its native element—a mere puddle of clay. At that time the banks of the Tiber were very low, and shelved away in places, allowing the river, when swollen by heavy rain, to overflow and penetrate the few buildings situated on the shore. The banks were afterwards built up so that no similar catastrophe could happen, and the splendid rows of

houses and a bridge add to the attractiveness of this part of Rome, where formerly little but green fields could be seen.

It is impossible to estimate the disappointment and vexation of spirit the artist must have felt at the loss of his work of art, after all the hours and care he had lavished on his first commission. He was destined to meet with a second and a third rebuff; but he finally carved it in marble, in the course of which he entirely remodelled it, and Mr. Beaumont had the great satisfaction of possessing his first idealistic fantasy in sculpture.

A visit to Florence about this time proved of immense value to him. He was tired of the French influence, which he felt to overshadow his own individuality; and in Rome this same dissatisfaction prevailed, extending even to the works of art that he saw. They were too classical in feeling, too detached and cold for what he was eagerly seeking to express; in fact, art in Rome was too reminiscent of archaeology. It was not until he had seen the Colleoni in Venice, the greatest of Donatello's works in Padua, and other masters in Florence, that he realised that he had found his "Golden Milestone" in the Fathers of the Renaissance.

He says: "I was struck by the absolute independence and freedom of thought and truthful representation of the ideas they possessed. Without being merely photographie, they were yet so true to nature that they revealed to me what I then understood as 'style', but which I have since learnt to regard as the expression of an artist's individuality." "The style is the man himself," says Buffon, whilst Lord Chesterfield calls it "the dress of thoughts". Thus it will be seen that environment plays an important part for the maker of things, influencing him all unconsciously to produce the workings of his own mind, his reflections being stimulated through having found some echoes of his own taste and mind in another's rendering. His wonderful figure, "Perseus Arming", was the direct outcome of this visit to Florence. A figure quite unlike that which he had seen in Florence, yet akin to it in spiritual force, in its note of perfection, beauty, tenderness, and refinement. He found that these Fathers of the Renaissance were not dead, but living through their works, and

the soul of the sculptor leapt out to theirs from the first moment of meeting. Prophets and seers were they, giving their royal gifts to the world for all time. Joyfully the spirit of this artist acclaimed them, and was baptized into their order; henceforth to walk with them so worthily that those who should come after would see in turn his foot-prints in the sands of Time and gain courage and inspiration to go forward rejoicing.

He began "Perseus" on his return to Rome, and whilst making this statuette he was thinking very earnestly of his artistic equipment. He had just seen works that showed an amazing mastery over materials, an astonishing technique when analysed. The idea had always been uppermost in Gilbert's mind that the artist worth his salt must gain a complete mastery of his tools. His opinion was strengthened by what he saw, and then came the thought that "Perseus", before becoming a hero, was only a mortal like himself, with many difficulties to overcome, and that he had to look specially to his own equipment. He found in his subject a presage of his own life, and he conceived the idea of writing his history by symbols, so that "Perseus Arming" actually became the first of a cycle of stories, the full meaning of which can only be revealed by the author himself. Here it may be said that, with that strange complexity of character that he possesses, he is a fatalist, very much alive to the influences that shape his destiny, a seer who visions in certain events an actual forecast of his own destiny. At the same time, as a scientist, he is prone to disregard mysteries and superstitions, bringing to bear upon them the cold mind of the investigator. His complex character, with its diametrically opposite qualities, puzzles many, who think that they know him.

"Perseus Arming" was sent to the Salon and the artist thus speaks of its reception: "Now comes the astonishing thing about this figure. It was accepted and obtained for me honourable mention. This gave me encouragement to continue the task I had set myself, to go on writing my history by symbol."

This work so modestly mentioned caused the greatest wonder, delight, and admiration in the artistic world, in which the public



ALFRED GILBERT, ABOUT 1885.





shared. Indeed, it raised a storm of inquiry and interest which has never abated in connection with anything he produces. His name was by this time well known and his fame established.

"Perseus" was acquired by Mr. J. P. Heseltine. A replica, one of four beautiful little figures in a glass case, can be seen at South Kensington Museum. Gilbert was the first to have his works exhibited at the Museum during his lifetime. Sargent had the same honour many years later, when the National Gallery broke through their rule, and established a precedent in his favour by hanging his pictures on their walls during his lifetime.

Thus, whilst Gilbert busily fashioned his thoughts into plastic form, working amongst friends who were mostly needy artists, he was experiencing the real Summer of his life in a delightful atmosphere of colour and sunshine; happy beyond words or expression in his art, and in his family, for his wife and children were ever his first thought. Every evening he took them for a walk, the young father proudly wheeling the perambulator, which held two children, whilst his wife carried the baby. These walks are amongst his happiest hours of remembrance. On one occasion they came across an Italian girl nursing her child outside a doorway, when a man appearing suddenly began to beat her savagely. Gilbert, strong of frame, sprang at him and sent him crashing to the ground, where he lay helpless for some minutes. He then rose unsteadily and slunk away, uttering threats of a terrible kind. Meanwhile the girl expressed her gratitude with many passionate gestures, and the party moved on. But the woman ever afterwards dogged his path, and in those evening walks was never far behind him. He began to have an uncanny feeling about it, and one day, when he and his wife stopped and questioned her, she admitted that she feared for his life. She had left the tyrant who had ill-treated her, and he had vowed vengeance on Gilbert. The girl being poor and very willing to work, his wife took her into her home and found her very useful. She became a faithful and devoted servant to all their family for years, and was very disappointed at not being allowed to accompany them to England. She posed for a head which was exhibited at the Royal Academy ; Sir Luke Fildes

sent a telegram to Rome to know if he might acquire it, a request immediately granted. The "Head of a Girl" and "A Capri Fisherman" created so much enthusiasm that a railing had to be put round them to keep off the people who crowded round, and a policeman stood beside them. The face of the former bust, with its broad planes, is not a beautiful type, but intensely interesting because of that indefinable quality, called soul, informing it and illumining the material form, a quality Gilbert ensures in all that he touches. The making of these busts was more in the nature of a challenge of skill. It was said by certain of his fellow-students that his forte was ideal for heroic groups and single figures, but that he could not do a portrait. Gilbert determined to prove that they were wrong, and produced these two works in his leisure as an interlude between other work.

On a visit to England he went to the Academy, and saw standing before his works two artists who did not know him by sight. "These are casts from Nature," declared one after closely examining them "Yes," said the other, "it would be impossible to make them so life-like by any other method."

Here Gilbert stepped forward. "Have you a compass with you?" he asked. They replied in the negative. "Neither have you a compass in your eyes," said Gilbert. "Look again, measure them, and you will see that they are more than life-size. I made them, and I ought to know."

After making a statuette which he placed on a plain pedestal, he was suddenly struck with the poverty of invention that can neglect the opportunity to enrich the pedestal with ornament. Here was an opportunity to make the pedestal part of the decoration. He later set himself to work to remedy this, and his pedestals, full of ornament, were the result.

Back again in Rome, he met with a pleasant and most unexpected surprise. His friend and fellow-student at Heatherley's, Matthew Ridley Corbett, appeared on his horizon, and they renewed a friendship that was to prove one of the brightest recollections in after life. When Gilbert left Heatherley's and took all the responsibilities of matrimony on his shoulders, Corbett temporarily passed out of his

life, for his strenuous work in Paris, at the school and at home, left no time whatever for letter-writing, or aught but the all-important problem of how to accomplish each day's work and how to provide for its material necessities. It happened to be a very cold, dark winter's afternoon when he was walking down a street in Rome, feeling strangely depressed and miserable, one of the inevitable reactions to which the too sanguine nature is subjected, when out of the murk and gloom the tall familiar figure of his friend hove in sight.

"Gilbert!" said Corbett. "Is it really Corbett?" said the other in delighted amazement, as if it were too good to be true. They repaired at once to the latter's home, where Corbett quickly became the friend of the whole family and the children's delightful play-fellow. That day, in exchange for Corbett's news, came the recital of Gilbert's adventures, and talk flowed on without a break till a late hour.

Corbett was a fitting example of the flower of English aristocracy. He was the son of a clergyman, descended from a long line that have made England's greatness, a man of the deepest refinement and sensibility; a true artist by nature and a very gallant gentleman. During the years that ensued in Rome, Corbett and the Gilberts made many expeditions together, and their minds were so perfectly attuned, though they ran in different grooves, that, of all the men of Gilbert's youth, this one remains in his memory closest to his heart. Some years later this friend married a widow, named Mrs. Murch, herself an artist, and his death came three years later. Corbett passed into the world of shadows, but his memory remains fresh and green.

He was one of the best-humoured men imaginable, possessing an absolutely even temper which was tested sometimes by his friend's practical jokes. A born naturalist, he found great pleasure in his fine collection of butterflies and moths. One day, a cabbage-butterfly fluttering through the room, suggested an idea to Gilbert. Having caught and placed it in a glass he decorated the poor insect by first dropping a little spirit over it, and then some finely powdered colours. The butterfly was soon resplendent in design and colour. Presently Corbett appeared. He was delighted, though puzzled to place it.

"A wonderful specimen. Quite unique, I should say," he cried, and after examining it carefully through a magnifying glass he grew more and more mystified. At last he said, "It is indeed a strange butterfly—half a hybrid, yet it has the Emperor's eye, and at the same time resembles a cabbage butterfly". Out came his setting board and pins, and having dropped some liquid under the glass the insect was soon ready to be set. It took him a long time preparing this fine specimen, and some letters passed about it to authorities on the subject, with colour sketches. Then Mrs. Gilbert divulged the trick that had been played, feeling that the joke was going too far.

Corbett was quite hurt for some time. "Gilbert, I never expected this of you," he said reproachfully. Then the humour of it struck him and he laughed with that hearty laugh of his. "After all, it was an excellent joke," he declared.

Gilbert and he were in great request at social gatherings in Rome. The former very rarely accepted any invitations, being far too deeply interested in his work and having a natural disinclination for such things. "He was always very difficult to dig out," his friend Lee once told me, when recounting their times together in Paris and Rome; and even the students he knew so well found he could very seldom be induced to leave work and join them in excursions. But he made an exception in a few cases, when the power and delight of exquisite music proved irresistible to him. In the early days at Rome he became acquainted with Liszt, and sometimes attended musical parties for the sheer joy of hearing him play. Miss Brewster, a wealthy American lady, was a friend of Liszt, and she used to hold a wonderful salon at her beautiful house in Rome where she gathered all the resident celebrities and passers through Rome to whom music and art were the chief attractions. Her major-domo, secretary, and friend was a young man named Harkness. She was elderly, somewhat resembling Lady Dorothy Neville in appearance and character.

At one of her great musical parties, when Gilbert and Liszt were present, a pupil of Liszt's played some Hungarian war pieces, and the master, who had withstood many entreaties to play, like some old war-horse, sidled up to the piano and stood close to the performer



as if he intended to turn over the music. What he did was to edge himself still closer to the player till he silently pushed him off the piano-stool, took his place, and finished the composition amidst hearty applause. He then turned from one theme to another, playing for more than an hour, with fingers as strong as steel and a touch as soft as velvet. In appearance the Abbé Liszt was a most imposing man, tall, with a face full of power, framed by a mane of long silver hair; and he wore the clerical habit of his order.

In the light of the present day it is amusing to read in old-fashioned books how the artist's status was regarded. Thackeray, matchless cynic that he was, unveils the sheer snobbery that underlay the fashionable opinions of his times. Ethel, in writing to Uncle Newcome, says: "You will order Clive not to sell his pictures, won't you? I know it is not wrong, but your son might look higher than to be an artist. An artist, an organist, a pianist: all these are very good people, but you know not *de notre monde*, and Clive ought to belong to it."

The same idea was still prevalent amongst an antiquated set of old fossils when Gilbert and Corbett were in Rome. The latter, being a bachelor, was a frequent diner-out; and the former remembers Corbett's laughter as he recounted a conversation that took place the night before at a dinner-party he attended. A retired General, who knew Corbett, was unaware that he had so far demeaned himself as to follow art in earnest, so he launched forth a bombshell: "They do tell me, don't you know, that there are young men in Society who have actually taken to paintin' for a livin'!"

Gilbert was soon to make another life-long friendship in a most unexpected manner. Rome was becoming unbearable in the approaching summer's heat, when he decided to take a house in a little hamlet near Perugia to continue his work in lovely country surroundings. Sir Frederick Leighton happened to be staying at the Hotel Bruffani, Perugia, where he came every year, and where he used to write his speech for the R.A. Banquet and get it from memory. With him was Giovanni Costa, the artist who was Gilbert's master in painting. One afternoon, when Gilbert was playing with his



children on the picturesque terrace of his house, a knock came on the garden door, and one of the children ran to open it. Leighton and Costa entered, and Leighton laughed as he regarded the scene. The two men saw a wonderfully pretty scene of happy home life, typically English, with an Italian setting; a gay little party of Bohemians, barefooted children with scanty garments on account of the great heat, playing uproariously with their boyish father; while their beautiful mother was smilingly engaged in plying her busy needle. She alone of the group looked dignified and cool, and fit to receive any visitors.

When Costa introduced Gilbert to Leighton, the former said, "Well, sir, I've known you by sight, and all my life by reputation; but I never had the honour of meeting you". To which Leighton replied, "I did not know you were here, or I would have come before with my dear friend Neno to see you." Later he asked, "I wonder if you would undertake a commission?" "Anything to please you," Gilbert replied. "Will you make me a statuette then? I have seen one of yours. I leave the subject entirely to you."

Amongst Gilbert's memories of his summer's joys, this incident stands out sharp and clear. His remembrance is vivid of Leighton's grace of person, his charm and captivating manners, his sincere and tactful sympathy, and his understanding of the artistic temperament. Gilbert found him an unfailing friend.

On that occasion both Leighton and Costa joined in their entreaties that he should lose no time in coming to England. They stayed till their dinner hour, then invited their host to join them. He refused, however, for he wanted to be alone to think out his subject. He says: "I thought first of Leighton's penchant for classical subjects; it must be something classical and appropriate for bronze. It flashed across me that I was very ambitious: why not 'Icarus', with his desire for flight? Then followed the vision of 'Daedalus' making wings for his son. Then I thought of a group first of the father fitting wings to his son; but remembered that had been done by Canova. I had never seen it, it might be surpassingly wonderful, so I determined to do a simple figure of 'Icarus'.

"I made no definite sketches except slight pen ones, then put them aside to wait till I returned to Rome. I now had in mind exactly the sort of little figure I wanted to make—the character should be Renaissance; Florentine rather than classical; for, though I knew Leighton's love for Greek art, he had also a great admiration for *Cinque Cento*. I was acquainted with the character of work done in Florence, and although much tempted to go again to study *Cinque Cento* art, I had a horror of being unduly influenced, which decided me to put aside my yearning till after I had made a sketch for the work in view.

"When we returned to Rome my first care was to pass in review several models about the age I wanted for 'Icarus'. I saw many, but not one that resembled my ideal, and began to think if I wanted to make the work in character of real *Cinque Cento*, I should have to go to Florence. I had already noticed a great divergency in type amongst those models I had engaged who were Romans or Florentines. A young fellow soon called having heard I wanted a model, and almost as though a miracle had taken place I saw he was a perfect type for me, though he was a Roman.

"I set to work at once, and for more than two years did again and yet again a study of this youth, never destroying the whole, but learning how to represent him in the character I decided. I began by the most realistic model to scale, measuring every point, reducing it to the size of a small model, copying every vein and tendon, making uglinesses galore; but they were dominated by an extraordinary beauty of form which covered them, till I began to feel I had learnt his form and could model it from memory.

"One day, alone in the studio considering and criticising my work, I fell into a despondent mood, when a rap at the door was followed by the entrance of Corbett. I had not seen him since our going to Perugia, and he knew nothing of my meeting with Leighton, nor my commission, as he had left Rome when we returned.

"The moment he came in he rushed to the figure and asked: 'When did you do this?' I then told him my news, and of my

perplexity to serve and deserve well of a man for whom I had such a great admiration.

“‘Well,’ said Corbett, ‘you need not worry about this—for I am sure Leighton will delight in it. It is just what he would like. Besides, it is the best thing you have done up to the present. I see in it a presage for the future. For Heaven’s sake don’t change it. Finish it, and get it through. In your hands this is the greatest chance any man could wish. Leighton, besides being a great artist, is a loyal friend to anyone to whom he holds out his hand.’ The dear old fellow then turned aside and I saw him pass his hand across his eyes, and I became aware that he was feeling deeply, and since I have all my life been more amenable to tears than to blows it can be imagined I soon joined my friend in a duet; and he must have known of the fact by the humidity of my hand-clasp—for so often as we had mingled our joys openly, we now in silence mingled our tears.

“It was time to close the studio and go—so we adjourned to the Gallinaccio, the *rendezvous* of all young English artists in Rome at that time, tacitly determined to dine and spend the evening together. But when we arrived at the ‘Caravanserie’, as we called it, we found a quorum of our associates gathered together to partake of the evening meal. There were present Lee, Robinson, Stevens, a musician, Robertson, Somerset, Scott, and a number I have forgotten—in short, a goodly representation of budding British artists sat down to dine at the same table.

“It was not long before my friend, who carried his heart on his sleeve, let loose all he was feeling in that great heart of his in regard to his visit. Before many minutes were over the fame of ‘Icarus’ was assured. Ah me—what loyal good fellows they all were, as genuinely delighted with Corbett’s enthusiasm as he was to give it forth. The evening passed in continuous merriment with plentiful libations, and tobacco, to add to youthful enjoyment.

“When we parted homewards in different directions I little dreamt of what was in store for me next morning. Arriving at the studio unusually early to get to work on that which had been so culogised, I found nearly the whole of my companions waiting at the door.

There they demonstrated their eagerness to view the cause of our Seer's opinion. There was nothing left me to do but to admit them; and, before I uncovered the figure of 'Icarus', I had an uncommonly nervous few moments lest it should not meet with their approval. But when exposed to view my guerdon was complete. Their ringing cheers could have been heard all down the street, and it was a unanimous acclaim. They were a generous, loyal band, these youths, always delighting in the triumph of a brother, without jealousy or carping hypercriticism. No more work was done that day. Off we went together to the Gallinaccio again; then a jaunt out to the Campagna was made, and it was one of those red-letter days in our lives we look back upon with a smile and a sigh. Had I been drawn in a quadriga my triumph could not have been greater. This is the sort of life to inspire endeavour, and I can safely say it was the making of my work.

"The approbation or disapprobation of one's fellow-artists is a thing to be valued. If the former, as in this case, it acts like magic in spurring one on to do better. If the latter, it gives room for serious reflection, and earnest determination to do better. In both cases it is valued because one knows it comes from those who have gone through hope and despair themselves, and who understand the subject through and through. A week of jubilation followed. Nobody appeared to do any work whatever, though we must all have worked pretty hard; and I can safely say Corbett did, because I have three little paintings which he called 'studies' done in that week, that I consider perfect works of art. Other sketches and studies I possess done at the same time by members of that brotherhood, and these tokens were presented to 'Il Presidente', as they called me, at supper-gatherings during the time in the Gallinaccio. There is something quite touching in this token of boyish homage to a 'camarade', who was not only suddenly elevated into a place of much distinction, but honoured by offerings of esteem and almost worship by his fellow-artists, because he happened to have accomplished something which they, as true artists, were delighted to acclaim.

"I myself was as proud as Punch at their enthusiastic effusion,

and began to believe that I really might, after all, make something of my 'Icarus'. Whatever it might be worth was entirely owing to the magnificent tribute of my friends.

"This week of jubilation was just a preliminary episode to another great triumph, but of a different character. Carnival was approaching and the band determined to take part in the masquerade. We, therefore, formed a committee to consider the best way we, as Englishmen, could participate in the farcical joys of a Roman Carnival. Someone proposed that we should represent our patron Saint, St. George, with all the paraphernalia attendant: a Dragon and a Lady-love for St. George, and, of course, the doughty Knight himself. We were in a burlesque mood, so we decided Corbett should be St. George, got up as a sort of Don Quixote figure, and Robertson, who was called 'Betsy' by us, was chosen to play the part of his Lady-love. Corbett undertook to dress the part whilst we, dabblers in sticks and clay, volunteered to construct the Dragon. Lee and myself were the designers who directed the efforts of the rest of the willing volunteers; and whilst I modelled the head in papier mâché, the rest busied themselves with the carcase, effected by means of cask-hoops, lengths of cane, and a whole linen-draper's shop of rolls of calico. A colossal undertaking was this, suited to the dimensions of the beast, which was at least fifteen metres (twenty yards) long with a beam and depth in proportion: it was so constructed that when five of us inside bore it on our shoulders and stood upright, we could walk in an undulating fashion, which might be calculated to give character to the beast's gait, without showing our feet; for they were cunningly hidden by a scaly fringe, which started from the under part of the creature, and trailed on the ground, thus effectually disguising all signs of the methods of locomotion.

"How we threw our energies into this work! We laboured, like Greeks making their Horse for the Siege of Troy, for nearly three weeks, often far into the night, especially the last two days, for apart from comparative construction, a considerable amount of paint was required for the adornment of the reptile. The aim was not to make an artistic triumph, but something as gaudy as possible, and that







*Photo, Hollyer*

THE ENCHANTED CHAIR.  
From the study in plaster, 1885. Pages 114-116.

was why we employed the painters of the band and furnished them with virulent colours. Oddly enough, they did not flinch at so in-artistic an outrage upon their naturally artistic proclivities; with 'Youth at the helm and pleasure in the prow', every man entered into the jest with as much zeal as if he were painting a 'spirit fresco', at that time the vogue.

"The day arrived for the launching of the monstrosity on the world of delirium. They all foregathered at my studio in the Via St. Basileo, each man ready to take his appointed place, furnished with an equipment of food and a flask of wine as though going for a picnic, all lusty and full of enthusiasm, and little did we think at the outset of the failing later of one or two of the quondam dauntless.

"The moment arrived for starting out, and after various struggles with the Beast to drag him forth from the studio, where he had been secretly built up, we paused to rest from our labours; for it was no slight business. His head and shoulders were just within the outside door, whilst his body and tail meandered through inner studios and out into the garden.

"Corbett, meanwhile, was tired of waiting for the due performance of the usual Roman promise given by the proprietors of the horse to have it at the door to time; so he cast aside the disguise in which he was attired, to go in quest of the hirer of his steed. Time passed; and we began to get restless and anxious, as there was no Corbett, and consequently no St. George, whilst we were all longing to start.

"After a hurried consultation, we determined to set forth in the hope that we should encounter our hero by the way. Each man, accordingly, took his place within the cavernous depths of the monster, leaving Stevens outside as the self-appointed guard of our movements, and, as it transpired, our defender during the day. Having given full instructions to the neighbours for the enlightenment of our St. George should he turn up after our departure, we began our crawl down the Via St. Basileo, past the Barberini Palace, to the corner of the Via Sistina, when we turned abruptly to the right

and mounted that time-honoured street in the direction of the Pincio. Our anxiety as to the fate of our saintly friend was allayed as we approached the Trinità di Monti, when the sound of a clatter of a horse's hoofs behind us, not strictly rhythmical, but rather denoting the paces of a well-trying cab-horse, awakened hopes in our minds that St. George was on our heels.

"Peering from my post at the head of the dragon, through a loophole contrived as an interior guide of the bestial procession, I discerned our goodly knight coming up at a hand-trot to take up his position at the head of his convoy.

"Then happened a great catastrophe, which occasioned much consternation. For lo, in the execution of a career proper to doughty knights of authority on occasion of manœuvres, the steed, never too sure of foot, missed it entirely, and, coming to the ground, threw his rider, who, in his turn shed his helmet mask, and everything pertaining to his headgear, yards ahead. It had the appearance of a rider being deprived of his head, on losing his seat. But in a twinkling I saw the stately figure, armour clad, arise from the ground, surmounted by the well-known head and genial face of our friend, convulsed with laughter, and busy in gathering up his equipment. The pause was of slight duration, for Corbett was as nimble as he was gentle and good-humoured, and his steed was not given to frolics. It was speedily captured by its rider, who, despite the hindrances of his fantastic dress, thanks to his long legs, was instantly reseated on his uncomfortable saddle, and the procession went on.

"But where was Betsy, his Dulcinea? She had come up on the pillion behind the knight, dressed up as a sort of British charwoman, and had apparently been spirited away, no one saw where, at the moment of the fall. She had eyes more at her service than we had; for she was free, while we were locked up inside the beast—so having gathered herself together, being unharmed by the fall, thanks to her padded garments, she scrambled up behind St. George, and grasped him sturdily round his waist.

"The laughter from the spectators, and from ourselves within, did good duty for a growling grunt of our dragon, and onward we

went, past the Trinita di Monti, and at the Villa di Medici we were greeted with the usual French salutations and humorous encomiums on the part of the students in front of their Alma Mater. Away and onwards we trundled up to the Pincio, till we arrived at the balustrade overlooking the Piazza del Popolo, followed by a countless rabble, kept at respectful distance by the zealous Stevens, always on guard. There a halt was called for a breathing-space, and the passing of the flask.

"Now began the winding descent from the summit of the Pincio to the plain of the Piazza del Popolo, where our real progress was to commence. For, if I remember rightly, the judges were seated in a booth erected between the two churches at the head of the Corso, and all processions had to pass them on their journey down the Corso to the Piazza da Venezia, a considerable distance.

"It was necessary to judge them at the outset, if they were to be judged at all; for few returned intact to the point of setting out. It was lucky we were so judged, as fate decreed we were never to return to the Popolo, but rather to take refuge up a side street off the Piazza Collonna, and hide our diminished faces and refresh our inner thirsty souls at a little *osteria* immediately behind the Palace: the latter was then doing duty as the General Post Office.

"While we were lingering in this haven of rest and refreshing ourselves within the limits of its hospitality, the joyful news was brought in by enthusiastic, if somewhat interested heralds, of our signal success in winning a prize of a few hundred lira, some of which, in anticipation, was given to the harbinger of good tidings, and this we did by dint of borrowing amongst the band, for none of us had much money. We were, as a matter of fact, in a sorry plight. One or two of the entrails of the Dragon had fainted; and their delinquency was the cause of our hastily beating a retreat to the friendly *osteria*. We could not upbraid them for their lack of staying-power; their failure was owing to the undue odours of glue and other odoriferous materials employed in the painting of the beast, added to the fatigue of carrying him, the heat and consequent thirst, and the unmeasured quenching of it."



To return to more serious matters: "Icarus" was finally cast in bronze by the maker himself, his first essay in this direction, and an entirely successful one. The statuette met with a tremendous ovation and gained the Prix de Rome when exhibited at the New Gallery.




ALFRED GILBERT AT WORK ON "EROS," 1886.

This studio was occupied successively by Sir Edgar Boehm, Alfred Gilbert and J. S. Sargent.  
The bust is of Baron Huddleston. *Page 106.*



## CHAPTER VI

### ITALY (*continued*)

T is easy to see by the light of after experience, where one has taken an ill-advised step. But the individual setting out on life's difficult pathway is not omniscient, and, taking the advice of others, Gilbert went to Rome when it would have been far better, as he realised later, if he had settled in Venice. Fate ordained otherwise. "Experience," said the Irishman, "comes at the wrong end of life. Why can't it come at the beginning?"

Gilbert writes: "I only know that had I but seen Venice first I should have inevitably settled there, and thereby saved myself great disappointment, much worry and hardship endured for some years in the Eternal City. Venice appealed to me much as Turner's pictures of the place have always done, as the grandest realisation of fairyland, dreamland, the abode of poetry, unlike anything I had ever seen or thought of, and only read about in the *Arabian Nights*. The mediaeval history of that wonderful Republic, the prowess of its sons in every branch of civilised activity, proved a sort of realisation of Aladdin's wonderful lamp. Unlike Rome, city of mouldy fragments, unholy traditions screaming at every corner, of barbarities, murder, unsavoury Paganism, and vulgar pomp; Venice appeared as the Enchanted Island, where fairies and knights-errant abode in the midst of noble grandeur: dignified silence and reposeful tranquillity reigned. The very stones are kissed by the rippling eddies, coming from the Bridal Feast of the Doge's wedding to the Bride of the Adriatic, and one could imagine that the golden rings and goblets cast into the water at the annual ceremony of many centuries were thrown up continually to keep alive and re-enrich this beautiful jewelled city.

"Venice was valuable in that I found a closer sympathy with my aspirations and aims in art than I ever gained, even in Florence.

The mediaeval spirit was more intimate and human, and its art more living than that of the more Southern Cities. The classic feelings of Rome, for example, so far removed by time, seemed cold and detached from human interest—save to the antiquarian. Carpaccio and the Bellinis appealed to me more than anything I saw in Rome.

“The characteristics of the Venetians were nearer resembling my ideal of what human beings should be; in fact everything exercised a charm without exception, even those things which most travellers find monotonous and sad in Venice failed to evoke an echo of their mood in me; for that silent grandeur spoke as a demeanour best suited to the dignity of art. The absence of carriages in the streets was as refreshing to me as it was joyless to others. I loved the reticent stillness, tempered by that murmuring poetry like the hum of bees and insects in a beautiful landscape on a hot summer’s day. Sufficient music as a running subdued accompaniment to heroic thoughts. The silence, broken only by the continuous low murmur, seemed a requiem to the grand prowess and noble aspirations peculiar to the Venetians.

“Then, that splendid representation of Colleoni, the only horseman visible in Venice, and he in bronze, was an artistic protest against the introduction of popular and undue movement, and so unlike other cities, where every action has to be proclaimed and advertised, as in a fair, or buzzing bazaar. Here, I thought, one might work in silence, and turn one’s efforts into the loudest blasts of proclamations of one’s energies, born of that intense silence which almost becomes unbearable noise when suffered too long. This enjoyment was never to be mine except on a subsequent occasion for a week, which happened in this way.

“About the end of my stay in Rome I became acquainted, through my old friend Dr. Steel, with a generous old gentleman and his son, who hailed from Huddersfield. They were doing the traditional grand tour of Continental Europe, and the father was bent upon giving his son all the advantages of such an experience, as a fitting finish to an interrupted university career. The father was suddenly summoned home before fully accomplishing his design, and the son,







*Photo. Hollyer*

MEMORIAL TO HENRY FAWCETT.

Bronze, 1887, in Westminster Abbey. *Pages 123-124.*

of delicate constitution, was considered incapable of being left alone; so, at the suggestion of Dr. Steel, to whom the father had applied for advice, I was appointed the son's guide, philosopher, and friend.

"It was arranged that we should all travel together as far as Florence, when the father would leave us to take our way by stages to Venice. Be it said here (in parenthesis) by confidential injunction of the parent, I was never to lose sight of his son day or night. As far as I remember now, I faithfully obeyed the charge during our meandering between Florence and Venice; and even there, so beset was I with the onus of my burden that my sleep at night was gravely interfered with lest I should allow it to get the better of me in the mornings, and prevent my being beforehand with my charge in the day's doings. Meanwhile a great change came over this youthful adventurer the moment his father's back was turned. For he began to assume the airs, graces, and importance of an hereditary monied man, and I soon discovered he intended trying to lead me, rather than I him. A sudden wiliness of a Machiavellian type awakened in him, against which I felt absolutely powerless. I was little more than a boy myself, and was accustomed to the frank and ingenuous nature generally found in English boys, rather than this sinister and elusive character.

"The best part of a week passed in this way in an hotel on the Riva Schiavoni, prophetically named, considering the relations existing between this unpleasant youth and myself; for I found my sense of duty and promise to his father had temporarily bound me to act as a slave to his son; a prospect little dreamt of when we set forth, he being then a deferential and modest being, quite subservient to both his father and me. He eluded all my vigilance with an uncanny cunning, and I became, so to speak, a fitting denizen in that hotel on 'The Slave's Bank'.

"About the middle of the week I left my room as usual at sunrise after a sleepless and anxious night, the result of my grave responsibility, and descended to the common room, thinking I should be well beforehand with my young Corsair. Nothing of the kind. He had outwitted me. On the table lay evidence of his wrong-headed

astuteness, in the form of a sealed letter addressed to me. I hurriedly tore it open, and, instead of a friendly note, found a terrifying admission, couched in these words: 'Run away with a Pole. Your bill paid till end of week,' and the signature. Oh, the callousness of youth! That was all, and more than enough for me. I can hardly describe my feelings when I saw I was in a dilemma, the horns of which were busy tossing me and my thoughts in every direction. The obstinate young fool, who had deliberately wrought his own ruin, was unworthy of a second thought. Selfish and sensual, he deserved all he would doubtless get in the future. But there was his benevolent and good father to be thought of, and his disappointment over his only son, and he a prodigal one. Then came the distressing reflection that though assured of the discharge of my hotel bill, I was unhappily without the means to live in Venice or to leave it. I did not want to leave Venice, a mine of wealth in treasures for me, unexplored. I therefore wandered forth in a hopeless, hapless, state, making inquiries everywhere, and wherever we had been together, to get some clue as to his whereabouts. I little dreamt that Botzen, in the Dolomites was his place of retirement. The next two days were wasted in the same fruitless search, and I bitterly regretted ever having undertaken such an unthankful task. On the third day, before my time had expired at the hotel, a telegram was handed in from Botzen, which expressed high spirits and joyful hilarity at the joining in matrimony of the runaway to his Polish bride.

"As he gave no address at Botzen, I felt my responsibility was ended as far as the runaway was concerned, nor could I communicate direct with his father, for with the true artistic temperament, added to inexperience of life, I had actually not got his home address. I therefore wrote to Dr. Steel, acquainting him with the facts, and sent a letter under cover to his father. I then reflected that this was an opportunity of seeing Venice more fully in undisturbed enjoyment for a few days during which I could store up impressions that would bear fruit later on; so I sent a wire to Rome for money, having a further project in view."

An amusing adventure took place in Venice through joining a

party of friends bent on following the ancient custom of serenading a lady on the Grand Canal.

It was one of those glorious starlight nights only to be seen in Italy, when the air was filled with a dreamy and magical light, that a band of four young men hired a gondola, and started to row on the Grand Canal. Musical instruments they had, and presently they rowed near a high building, and in the shadow began their songs to the accompaniment of a mandolin and guitar. It was a thrilling moment when their voices rose in unison and, as they thought, melody. The song went on for a little time and presently a window was softly opened. The singers smiled in the darkness. Here was an appreciative fair listener charmed with their voices. Suddenly the music ceased, for from above—from that self-same window—descended a torrent of water, none too clean; two of them were huddled together drenched to the skin, but Gilbert and one of his companions had drawn a tarpaulin closely over themselves, and thus escaped the flood. Meantime they heard the bucket being replenished, and a second shower enveloped them. This was too much; they hastily rowed away, pursued by the mocking laughter of someone above. It was a literal rendering of pouring cold water on their good intentions to do honour and give pleasure by their song.

“Impecunious, and imbued with a love for adventure, I intended to indulge my desire to see the wonders of Padua: artistic, archaeological, and historical. Having seen a photograph of Guatemalata’s statue by Donatello I wanted to view it in its actuality as I had just seen Verrocchio’s ‘Colleoni’ in Venice.

“Michael Angelo is said to have exclaimed, when coming in sight of Donatello’s ‘St. George’ in Florence, ‘Cammina!’ (Walk!) What a pity there is no record of his having seen Verrocchio’s grand masterpiece, for then, indeed, we should have had some stupendous utterance, characteristic of his predominating rugged mind.”

Padua, probably the oldest city in Northern Italy, resembling Chester in character, had another attraction in being the birthplace of Livy and Mantegna the painter.

“The history of its art was specially interesting, because it had



absorbed much of the Tuscan art influence, whilst its architecture was pervaded by a great Germanic influence, as indeed was the case all over Italy in the thirteenth century, which gave way to the Italian influence founded upon that which was Germanic. It is certain that in painting, Padua, in the fourteenth century, was the seat of the energies of the best painters in Italy, except Tuscany.

"At that period those who governed 'Les Carraras' distinguished themselves by their love of the arts. The old Paduan School owed its origin to Florence, and received further impulse through Giotto, who, in turn, was succeeded by a constellation of brilliant artists, amongst others, Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna.

"During my short time in Venice I had been busy in acquiring knowledge of its art, and found that it all pointed to an original inception through Paduan influence; hence my desire to see Padua was intensified, and at this point I suddenly felt inspired to make the journey on foot from Venice to Brindisi, taking Padua on my way.

"It must have been Horace's account of his journey to Brundisium in company with his patron Mæcenas, that inspired me to emulate the poet's example. I loved and admired him as a schoolboy, even as much as my old schoolmaster, Alfred Leeman, who used constantly to quote him as his favourite Latin author.

"Looking back over nearly fifty years I find it hard to realise this foolhardy and Quixotic enterprise in daring to set out on foot from Venice to Rome and thence to Brindisi. But at the time possible difficulties and dangers only added a zest and romance to the undertaking. I have noticed that a man in his early twenties is less prone to see danger ahead than the older man to avoid its overtaking him.

"I have not forgotten the moment of my exit from Venice and the point at which I began to negotiate the long causeway leading to the mainland, nor my reflections on that silent trudge until I entered Padua, when, on looking back, I realised the enchanting beauty of the City I had left. Then my thoughts turned homewards, but instead of wandering about the place most familiar to my boyhood, they flew straight into the National Gallery, and beckoned my gaze upon the wonderful picture-poems of Turner. For the first time I

realised how great a poet-artist he was, who had seen and knew how to interpret fancy and yet ensure a living portrait of beautiful fact."

This was the true value of travel to a young artist, for he learnt to appreciate the efforts of great men and their aims in a manner quite other than that possible to him when admiring their work away from its subject, exhibited in a picture gallery.

"It dawned upon me that Turner was possibly the greatest artist-poet since Rembrandt, and this feeling of admiration of his genius has never changed; nor has my gratitude to John Ruskin, the greatest of his apostles.

"I was able to endorse my opinion of the latter years afterwards when I saw an exhibition of his own works, which demonstrated the great pains he had been at to get behind the mind not only of Turner, but of all those that he wrote about so beautifully.

"I remember thinking of Rogers's poem about Venice, with Turner's chromatic dicta upon the same subject, and decided that the painter-poet ought to share the laurels with the poet-painter."

"Upon arriving at Padua, the first thing I went to find was Donatello's great masterpiece. Although an admirer of his work, I was unprepared to see him in the light this grand work of art revealed; so unlike, as it is, to the sweeter and almost effeminate examples in Florence. I was so taken aback that I was unable to form any comparison between this statue and that of Colleoni by Verrocchio. Both men were imbued with unique personality, indicative of the mind and the aims which had governed the two separate minds, and thus formed distinct personalities, that I felt that no comparison was possible, nor should be attempted. The old adage 'Comparisons are odious' is full of wisdom; and the futility is apparent in modern art criticism of building up individual reputations at the expense of a number of equally well-deserved ones, by advancing superficial merits to the detraction of sterling qualities of quite opposite, though equally valuable individualities."

Gilbert's observations formed in these early years remain unaltered in 1928. He says: "On looking back upon my impressions of great works of art I am constrained through my calling as a

sculptor to pass in review many prodigious works of sculpture in antiquity and mediaeval times, and to compare them and their influence on me with corresponding efforts of more modern productions. To speak of statues as such, for they generally represent the art of statuary, would impose a task beyond my power; I have seen so many great epoch-making works in this class; and as these come more directly within the ken of the generality of folk, what I might have to say might be a very inefficient adjunct to the appreciative writing of scribes and connoisseurs, both able and dilettante, that I hesitate to place myself in the position of a mere echoer of their opinions. I will take, therefore, the equestrian statues that belong to a special class in plastic art.

"Of examples of these works I had occasion to pass in review whole legions; but I can only recall four as being superbly satisfactory, and these cover a period from Marcus Aurelius down to Charles the First of England. They are: 'Marcus Aurelius' on the Capitol at Rome; 'Colleoni' of Venice; 'Guatemalata' in Padua; 'Charles the First' in Trafalgar Square. Other statues there have been of different periods more or less remarkable; but none more so than those I have named.

"There are three other very extraordinary equestrian statues I must mention, two of our time, and the third of a much earlier date. The first two, respectively by Frémiet and Dubois, represent 'Joan of Arc', the latter is of Henri Quatre, on the Pont Neuf at Paris."

Whilst pursuing his way from Padua he was impressed by the beauty of a subject for a sketch. A girl was slowly coming down a hill trailing a large bough of almond blossom behind her, so luxuriant that it formed a background to her figure. Barefooted and beautiful, with distaff in hand, she was engaged in the curious occupation of spinning as she walked, her downcast eyes intent upon her work. She might have been one of the three fell sisters weaving the threads of hid destiny. Of this meeting Gilbert wrote:

"It was soon after leaving Padua and on my approach to Ringo, when half regretting my enterprise in beholding the uninviting nature of the country I had entered, after the glories I had left behind,

that I encountered my spinning Sybil, with the almond blossom bough in full bloom, bound, as she told me, for Chiffalo. After giving me her blessing and all good wishes for a safe journey to Rome, she continued her way serenely.

"Chiffalo is a most picturesque old town on one of the Islands just below Venice. Florence was my next objective, the birthplace of Savonarola, and, as a city intimately connected with Aristotle and Tasso, it naturally interested me. Just before entering it I met with a Capuchin monk who might have been, from his ascetic appearance, the wraith of the great Reformer. I spoke to him in Venetian dialect—it was mere hazard, but a lucky one, for there is no more propitiatory introduction between strangers than the mother-tongue on the part of one or the other. His facial expression changed, his gloominess vanished, and he became quite cordial. I told him of my purpose and inquired the best way to Bologna. 'It is practically a straight road,' he said. 'And would advise you to follow it if you want to reach Rome by as direct a route as possible. From Bologna take the road to Piofa—and thence to Florence.'

"I thanked him, and was about to continue on my course, when he arrested me. 'My son,' he said, 'I give you my blessing though unasked. I would I could promise you, heretic though you have revealed yourself to be, that an old monk's blessing might safeguard you against all the perils of your undertaking. But alas, in these days Holy Church and the protection of the blessed Saints seem to be put at naught in favour of restlessness and opposition to all holiness.'

"I then told him of the contrast between his advice and that of the maiden outside Ringo, and that I marvelled at his want of faith in mankind, as contrasted with that of a simple peasant girl. 'I am not by profession of the world,' he replied. 'But most worldly in my knowledge as to all that pertains of it. The maiden was of the world, yet the Madonna be praised—most unworldly. May she remain ever so!'

Gilbert's notes about his journey show his power to observe, and make use of his impressions. He noticed later the middle distance in the landscape appeared first as a dark spot. Then, as he came

nearer, a belt of glorious pine trees with red stems, through which the warm evening sunlight glowed and scintillated. The figure of a man against this background appeared regal; but, on looking back a few minutes later, the lonely figure had moved on and was silhouetted against the sky. It had lost all its charm, and appeared quite insignificant, so that the artist became aware of the advantage of a decorative background as a valuable adjunct to a picture.

He recalled this experience in later years upon seeing a huntsman emerge from a wood, with the autumnal colouring behind him. The ensemble of the man, in riding attire, with scarlet coat, seated on a chestnut mare, made a resplendent picture; for the trees and foliage were the natural setting, making a strong contrast to the conventional and rigid figure. But when he got clear of the wood, with only the sky as a background, he appeared to lose his dignified bearing and became commonplace. This experience seems to bear out Sir Edward Poynter's words: "I consider a picture should be packed with interest from corner to corner". The artist who disdains to make use of what he can so easily avail himself of, and who is content with an empty background, is the loser.

Gilbert found himself often in lonely places where he seldom met even one human being during the day. Travellers were very rare in those days; for it was before the time of Cook and Lunn, with their influx of tourists exploring Italy thoroughly. Bands of robbers frequented the mountainous parts, and not infrequently carried off some traveller, to demand a ransom from his relatives. Men have been known to disappear altogether and never be heard of again.

Nightfall found him on one occasion in the Volcain mountains, when a herdsman approached and menaced him. He waited till the man came near enough with the long wooden lance carried by *butteri* or herdsmen, and, seeing he meant aggression, Gilbert suddenly seized his weapon and momentarily paralysed its power by swiftly drawing him within striking distance. He then struck him on the head with his walking stick, and left him insensible. He never heard any more of the incident.





*Photo. Salmon*

THE STATUE OF QUEEN VICTORIA AT WINCHESTER.  
Erected 1887. Model exhibited Royal Academy, 1888. *Pages 125-126.*



Gilbert put up for the night at an inn, if there happened to be one handy; if not, he was too tired after the fatigues of the day to take exception to a grassy bed, from which he used to awake next morning feeling ready for any encounter or adventure. His physical robustness stood him in good stead over this ordeal of strength. His will-power made him determine to carry his project through to the end.

At inns he received a ready welcome on account of his music. A guitar was always at his service, and he indulged in the ancient art of the *improvisatore* on several occasions. The simple villagers were delighted when he sang a Neapolitan love-song. One hastily made up, with topical allusions, charmed them completely. One evening, after a frugal supper, he took a plate from the table, and with a match blacked the entire surface; then with his finger made a picture, by taking out the lights and leaving the shadows. Portraits and landscapes, designs and animals were rendered in a few seconds by this method, and the innkeepers were so delighted that they refused to make any charge for his board and night's lodging. He was treated like some prince that had arrived in their humble abode; and when he left the next morning they begged him to make a long stay, as they pressed upon him offerings of their choicest fruit and flowers.

He mentions a modern rendering of an ancient fable. Coming to a clear stream he paused to regard a youth leaning over and very earnestly beholding his reflection as in a mirror. Here was Narcissus to the life, falling in love with his own image; mistaking it for that of a being surpassing all he could imagine of his own beauty.

The prosaic task of washing his clothes led him to another stream, crystal clear, where he saw a group of young girls with skirts tucked up, wading in the stream, that might have inspired most fascinating fantasies. In later years Burne-Jones painted the "Mirror of Venus", which reminded Gilbert very strongly of this very same scene.

I know no mind so richly stored with impressions as this artist's. He will tell you, "All my life I have been learning and I am a student still". He not only learns, but makes use of many accidental things which others pass unnoticed. He holds that education should

go on as long as life lasts. Hokusai, the great Japanese artist, was of a similar opinion. Thus the artist finds a wealth of materials in all around him, and nowhere more abundantly than in Italy, where not only are the "types" of human beings magnificent, but the extreme luminosity of the atmosphere and sky, the peculiar colouring of the landscape, of soft madders and greys, rose and lilac, prove enchanting to the painter.

Gilbert must have been deeply thankful when he ultimately arrived at Brindisi, when he crossed to Capri and rejoined his family. They returned to Rome, where he executed a commission to make six life-sized copies from the antique for a Mr. Browne, a retired sheep-farmer, who had made a large fortune in Australia. He had a town house in Gloucester Road, and a very fine residence in North Devon, at which he entertained Gilbert most hospitably. It was a curious thing for a man with so many ideas of his own simmering in his brain to be called upon to make copies of others' works; but Gilbert took a great interest in doing them, and gave his client such satisfaction that he gladly paid the sum of a thousand pounds.

After this, he received an invitation from Sir Frederick Leighton and Boehm to come to England for the express purpose of making a Quadriga for the arch on Constitution Hill. At that time it contained the Duke of Wellington's statue by Wyatt, and this was to be sent to Aldershot in favour of a better design. The drawing of Decimus Burton's arch was sent to Gilbert, with the intention of helping him to adapt his design to it. He therefore set to work and completed a sketch-model of the Quadriga, which was highly approved of. Meanwhile, Boehm was commissioned to make the statue of the Duke of Wellington that now stands at Hyde Park Corner. The road having been enlarged, the work was put on a little strip of land opposite St. George's Hospital. And then the Committee found, after paying for Boehm's work, there was no money for the Quadriga. All this covered long months of waiting, with many meetings and great discussions, ending in much ado about nothing.

The Quadriga was postponed, and not till long years after was the subject revived, and the commission given to another man,







*Photo. Winter*

THE MAYORAL CHAIN, PRESTON,  
WITH SMALL DRESS COLLAR.

Silver-gilt and enamel, 1888. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1892

Captain Adrian Jones, who had first been a veterinary surgeon in the Life Guards, and afterwards qualified as a sculptor. A wit once defined a Committee as a thing without a body to be kicked, or a soul to be condemned: it seems an apt description. Under such unfair conditions it is astonishing that any man should be found willing to be a practitioner in the art of sculpture, for even if he succeeds in getting paid for certain works, there are always these constant disappointments, hopes shattered, and time lost, for which he has no redress. The sculptors are the most patient body of men imaginable, and the rapture of pursuing is often the only prize the vanquished wins.

The promise of a definite and important commission certainly hastened the artist's departure from Rome: but the time had come for him to leave for England in any case. His children had to be sent to good schools. They spoke Italian fluently, and hardly knew a word of English; he and his wife saw the necessity of living in England.

What struck him as very strange was his success. He was greeted with very great enthusiasm, overwhelmed with hospitality, inundated with invitations, pursued by the Press and by fashionable and wealthy people, who all wanted him to do commissions for them. He was welcomed and deferred to by artists many years his senior, worshipped, and his ideas copied by his junior brethren, all of which he took at its true worth, valuing greatly the opinion of those whom he deemed capable of judging his work, and discounting the echoes of that opinion, and the people who would have made him the fashionable sculptor. He remembered Boehm's words—Boehm, man of the world.

Chief amongst those whose opinions he valued were his three faithful friends, now, alas, all gone. Sir Frederick Leighton, Edward Lanteri, and Boehm. He has never forgotten what their enthusiastic affection meant to him at the beginning of his career. It is no exaggeration to say that Gilbert, so young in appearance and in years, but rich in his many gifts, had the world at his feet. His next work was to be the Piccadilly Circus Fountain, a tremendously important

one for so young a sculptor to undertake. Alas, tragedy was to outweigh comedy over this experience; and it would have been well for him had he but known the trial that awaited such an undertaking. It might have altered the whole current of his life if it had never been offered to him, or had he refused it.

## CHAPTER VII

### FROM ROME TO LONDON



His return from Rome to London in 1885 was marked by the cordial and affectionate welcome he received from Sir Frederick Leighton, Boehm, and Lanteri, and he saw a great deal of the two latter. His parents were desirous that he and his family should stay with them, so they went to 89 Maida Vale, where they lived for some time. Later the doctor advised him to take a house at the seaside, as his wife was far too delicate to live in London. This plan was hailed with delight by all parties, since they shared alike in an intense love for the sea. Gilbert took a bungalow at Birchington, where his wife and two daughters and youngest son lived, whilst he had the two elder boys with him, in London, going to school every day. Joyful reunions took place at Birchington whenever Gilbert could spare time from his commission to go there with his boys, the home by the sea became an increasing delight to them, and his wife's health improved. The bungalow had once been the abode of Rossetti, who was buried at Birchington.

Gilbert always had his happiest moments of inspiration by the sea, while contemplating its form, colour, movement, and never-ending variety. In his painting one sees that he makes use only of transparent and luminous colours, such as remind one of the sea. Thus, the angels' wings in the St. Albans altarpiece are made of shells which he coloured with all the hues of the sea—pinky, pearly, greeny grey-blues merging into green, soft umbers, and silvery shades.

He says that the town only raises discontent in his mind, but he finds everything he wants as he stands on the seashore. "At fashionable watering-places, where crowds of beautifully attired people parade, one has only to turn from them to the ocean, and they become eclipsed and extinguished by the majesty and power of a mighty and mysterious force of nature." Man finds his own level then, and is obliged to own his subjection to a source he has never



been able to gauge or conquer; for he holds no key to its mastery. "Rule, Britannia!" is a vain boastful command if taken literally. Through science and craftsmanship men can build great ships, which are flung to the elements in a few moments of storm. In its pitiless and cruel character the sea garners men's lives, and in a flash claims the bodies of the sons of men and entombs them in its immeasurable depths. Man learns the lesson of humility and reverence and realises his own impotence as he muses by the sea. A man sometimes enters a seafaring life professing to disregard any spiritual force; but this attitude soon changes, and one observes that he is religious, often superstitious. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."

Then the treasures in crustacean form are a source of delight and inspiration to those who can appreciate exquisite design. A shell is one of the most beautiful things in Nature, far more lovely, far more wonderful than decorations devised by man. It has sometimes struck me as curious that shells are generally only to be seen as decorations in lodgings. That landladies, conspicuously noted for their inartistic proclivities, should instinctively choose the most beautiful of ornaments for their mantelpieces suggests that there must be some lurking germ of an artistic nature not wholly eliminated by their sordid occupation.

In speaking of the sources of inspiration to which the artist may go for design and ornament, Gilbert says: "In my subsequent efforts I found inspiration more than ever in natural forms, and did not confine myself to any one class of living objects; but chose the treasures of the sea, fishes of all kinds, and every class of molluscan and crustacean life, the crab, lobster, and such like. To these beautiful models I am indebted for many of the best incidents of artistic design and construction."

The study of conchology with its infinite variety of beautiful forms has ever fascinated Gilbert. The shell is often used as the base and motive for some of his very intricate designs, and it is to be found interwoven with the base of his celebrated Piccadilly Fountain.





*Photo. Hollyer*

G. F. WATTS, R.A.

Bronze bust, 1889. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1889. In the National Gallery, Millbank.



It was at this period that he made the acquaintancc of Stacey Marks, R.A., who was a painter of birds, and had a museum of their skelctons. Upon Gilbert's first visit to his house at Primrose Hill, his host kindly presented him with a number of these specimens. No gift could have been more acceptable, nor, as it proved, more valuable to him as suggestions for form in design which he has freely used. Mrs. Marks had been a pupil at Heatherley's when Gilbert was there, and the latter always found he was a welcome guest in their pleasant and artistic home.

He had his own studio in Fulham Road, opposite to his friend Boehm's, while Lee had a studio and foundry in Trafalgar Square, Chelsea. At this foundry Gilbert had a dangerous experience which might have cost him his life. Always interested in the scientific side of the materials he used, he conceived the idea of experimenting with a material about which nothing was known at the time, though it had been introduced into England in a practical form. *Cera Perduta*, as it is called, is really a very ancient art used by the Phoenicians, Etruscans, and Early Romans: possibly, too, by the Ancient Greeks. Mount Hymettus must have been an inexhaustible storehouse of wax, suggesting that this process was practised by the Greeks.

Gilbert was eager to test its possibilities; but, in order to do so, the furnace had to be kept alight for ninety-eight hours on end. He engaged the services of Lee and Onslow Ford to share his vigil, the idea being to take turns to watch and act as stoker. He was disappointed to find that they were both unequal to the task, though they appeared fired by his enthusiasm at the beginning. Both men fell out at an early stage, leaving Gilbert to carry on the vigil alone. This he did with a dogged persistence until he was found unconscious, and was taken home more dead than alive. He says it was owing to his father's wisdom and unremitting care that he recovered. He was so swollen by the intense heat and fatigue that his parents had to cut him out of his clothes, and he lay for a day and a half as if actually dead, with his mother in great anxiety and his father in constant attendancc, till he recovered. For some days he was in a

sort of trance, dimly conscious at times of people looking at him, but unable to speak, or open his eyes. This experiment, so costly to himself, was a failure for want of helpers with some power of endurance. Had his friends carried out their part, a very different result might have been obtained. The art of moulding with Cera Perduta passed back to the Italians, after having been found less satisfactory than other methods employed in England.

In his statuette "Comedy and Tragedy" the figure of a boy was produced from a suggestion only—the title of a play written by his namesake W. S. Gilbert. Miss Mary Anderson was playing the leading part in it at the Lyceum at the time, and in the same way that Doré's "Kiss of Glory" led to Gilbert's "Kiss of Victory", the mere title of this play inspired him to make a statuette. He says: "Having always the theatre in my mind at this time I conceived the notion of harking back to the Greek stage upon which masks were always worn, and I conceived a stage property boy rushing away in great glee with his comedy mask, and on the way being stung by a bee. This was the only way I could suggest the hidden pain and passion of the boy. The youth seen from one position through the open mouth of the comic mask exhibits hilarity, but from the opposite side he is seen glancing at his wounded leg, and his expression assumes one of pain and sadness." Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1892, a replica may be seen in South Kensington Museum. Another statuette "An offering to Hymen" was executed at the same time.

Professional men, such as lawyers, doctors, and clergymen, by the nature of their callings, come across experiences in which the ludicrous is sometimes mingled with the most solemn events. But art seems to bring its practitioners into even more frequent contact with strange characters, and incidents in which tragedy and comedy meet.

One day Gilbert received a note delivered by hand asking him to call immediately on a matter of the greatest importance. The signature was a woman's name which he did not know. On consulting his father he was told she belonged to a family of opulent Jews, living close by. So he called.







*Photo. Hollier*

ALFRED GILBERT, 1889.  
From the portrait by G. F. Watts, R.A.

In the hall a stout lady with a tear-stained face met him, who said rapidly: "You are Mr. Gilbert? You are a sculptor? You make busts?" Then she broke down and cried. "Can you make one after death?" she asked. Upon his replying in the affirmative, she showed him into a room where her daughter was lying dead. "They tell me they make casts of faces," she went on, "I want a cast of my dear daughter." Gilbert was not long in getting the materials, and got a casting, which he gave the lady. No question of payment was mentioned, and he was, therefore, somewhat surprised when she put an envelope into his hand, which he put into his pocket as he was leaving the house, and entirely forgot. At dinner he related the story to his father, and said, "By the way, she gave me an envelope with something in it." He drew it out, and lo! it contained—a few pence. Whether the lady in her grief and agitation had mistaken coppers for sovereigns, or had gone out of her mind completely he never knew. Only the strange fact remained that, for his labour in the zenith of his fame, he had received the magnificent sum of a handful of coppers. "Some people have strange ideas about sculptors," said Gilbert, with a smile, when relating this event. "I think she must have thought I was a moulder, or plasterer, and imagined a small tip was all that was needed."

Another curious incident took place soon after. Mr. Gilbert senior had written a solemn piece of music for a choir, which a musical man heard, and immediately bought for a small sum. One day Gilbert suggested to his father that they should go to a music-hall that evening, his intention being to cheer him up. His mother had gone away on a visit, a very rare occurrence, and his father was feeling lonely. But the latter had never been to such an entertainment in his life, and had a strong prejudice against music-halls, never failing to decry their pernicious influence on youth. However, he wished to be fair in his judgment, and he consented to accompany his son, to find out what the attraction was that they held for many people.

Soon after they were seated the strains of a new air were played very rapidly by the orchestra. His father looked puzzled—listened

attentively. "It seems remarkably like my own composition," he said. At this point Lottie Collins rushed on to the stage, and the music was played in frantic time: "Ta-ra-ra-Boom-de-ay!" She danced to the tune with indescrivable vigour, in her own individual and inimitable way, danced wildly, and with such fervour that she carried her audience away.

The words were sheer rubbish, but they caught on in some inexplicable way like wildfire; and the whole house rose and applauded again and again, while London soon went completely mad over it. Organs ground out the tune in the streets, boys whistled it everywhere, and Lottie Collins continued to delight huge audiences night after night with "Ta-ra-ra-Boom-de-ay!"

Meanwhile Lottie Collins, having heard who was the composer, and the truth about the transaction, wanted Mr. Gilbert to accept a large sum of money, which he refused. Then the man who had reaped a harvest out of it offered him compensation, which was accepted. So, even in the musical world, "one man sows and another reaps"; and it is doubtful if any of the public knew the name of the composer, nor the fact that the air had been sadly diverted from its original tendency.

Gilbert went several times to Panshanger, Earl Cowper's family seat. On his first visit, however, he met with a curious reception. He arrived at the country station, where he busied himself in looking after his luggage. He saw several people getting into carriages, but there appeared to be no one to meet him. He saw the carriages drive off, but no one came to speak to him. He was feeling stranded, when two men-servants came up and asked if he were for Panshanger? Upon hearing that he was, they suggested his coming with them in the luggage-cart—to which he agreed. One of them offered him a cigarette which was declined, and the two then talked together, only putting one question to him. "Who are you with?" "Mr. Gilbert," he replied gravely. "Ah", said the other, "he went on in the carriage." On approaching a country inn the men stopped the cart and went in to get a drink, first inviting him to join them, which he refused. They then said they would not keep him waiting long, and

they soon rejoined him. He could see they were puzzled at his attitude, and evidently thought he was decidedly unsociable in declining their invitation, so left him to his thoughts as they drove along. He was amused to find that they regarded him as his own valet.

Arrived at Panshanger, the cart entered the servants' quarters, and Gilbert found himself in a large hall. The two men had gone off, and the major-domo came forward in a great state of consternation and with profuse apologies; he could not think how the mistake had occurred. Mr. Gilbert was expected to arrive, and he had not come with the other guests. He then showed Gilbert to his room, his host and hostess by this time having gone upstairs to dress for dinner. Gilbert was the first in the drawing-room, and some guests coming in he entertained them as if he were the host. Afterwards Lord Cowper and Lady Cowper were full of apologies and regret that it should have happened. At dinner the men who had come in the cart were both waiting at table, and Gilbert caught sight of the startled horror on their faces when they realised their mistake. The one waiting on him at dinner came to his room after he retired and asked to be forgiven, but his apologies were cut short. "Make your mind easy—it was my fault," said Gilbert with a smile. The man thanked him and disappeared.

In visiting the picture gallery at Panshanger he sought out one portrait of a woman of remarkable beauty. It was not on account of any superlative quality as a work of art, but because it bore an unmistakable likeness to his mother's sister, who had always been regarded by her family as the possessor of more than her fair share of good looks.

Lord Cowper said: "That is the famous Ann Cole of whom we have heard so much recently in connexion with the Berkeley Peerage petition. As a work of art I need hardly tell you it is only an ordinary example of the School of its period, and it is outclassed by the other examples we have seen."

Gilbert told him that it so closely resembled his aunt that it might be her portrait, and that she was a lineal descendant of the

same family from which Ann Cole sprang—his grandfather, James Cole.

"It is a strange coincidence that you should come across an ancestress in this gallery," remarked Lord Cowper, "but what I am going to tell you is stranger still. I recollect when I first saw you that your type was very familiar to me as someone I know very well, but could not place you at the time, and now that I compare you with this portrait I see the same family type unmistakably apparent!" He then dwelt upon the fact that Ann Cole's ancestors were of highly gifted origin on her father's side.

Mrs. Green, widow of the historian, was in the habit of giving *recherché* little dinners at her old-world house in Kensington Square, and she invited Gilbert to one of these to meet Robert Browning. The party consisted of four persons, her brother, a military man, acting as host. When she retired to the drawing-room, the latter took her place at the head of the table, and invited Robert Browning to take a glass of port. He then asked his young guest what he drank? To which he replied that he generally drank beer when he was at home. Thereupon Browning, putting on a schoolmasterly manner and leaning forward, said very impressively: "Young man, they who drink beer, think beer". Gilbert, nettled by his superior airs, said, "What a pity, sir, that you did not drink more beer".

Browning never forgave this retort. When they met again later, he had been invited to join the R.A.'s in their holiday trip to Ightham Mote, and Gilbert found him at the station with the rest of the party. Marcus Stone began to introduce Browning, who said stiffly, "I think we have met before". To which Gilbert replied cheerfully, "That being so, there is no need for an introduction". He often came across the poet, who preserved his air of aloofness and detachment, and looked with extreme disfavour on the young artist who had treated him without ceremony.

On the strength of his "Icarus" Gilbert was made an Associate of the R.A. when he was only thirty-three. Those elected were received in the great octagonal Hall, where tea and coffee and light refreshments were laid out. When he arrived only one member was



present, Herbert, R.A., painter of religious subjects. He welcomed Gilbert very kindly, and speaking with a strong French accent made a little speech beginning with "I am an old man and you are a young one", but his halting delivery and foreign accent caused his hearer to wonder how a Frenchman came to be admitted into the Academy and made an R.A. His speculations were put to an end by the entry of Val Prinsep, who only laughed irreverently at the end of Herbert's preamble, and called out loudly—"Now then, Gilbert, don't you believe a word that old boy has been telling you". Herbert only smiled and took it in good part.

When Herbert was out of ear-shot Prinsep in his humorous way said: "It is a little peculiarity of Herbert's to imagine himself a Frenchman. This is how it happened. Years ago he and Landseer went abroad together. First they broke their journey in Paris, where they hired a cab to drive round the city, but the cab broke down, and the horse broke down, and in the fall Herbert broke his English!" He then became serious, and in a few graceful and touching words welcomed Gilbert and congratulated him on the honour to which he had attained.

Prinsep and Storey, R.A., were born humorists and raconteurs. The latter used to sing a famous song about "McDaly and the Model" (who at one time was in great request). Gregory, R.A. was a fine painter, and also an excellent singer of West Country songs. In his speech he stammered greatly, but he sang without the least impediment. Henry Moore, R.A., painter of seascapes, a man of handsome appearance, used to render sentimental songs admirably. Alfred Drury was famous for his singing of old-world songs, and at the Arts Club dinners he would charm his listeners with selections from Handel and Purcell. He had been a chorister, and had received a perfect training in music. What a host of talent used to be freely displayed when the leading men in art met together; and some of their amusing little traits of character often recur to the one who mingled with them. There were Marcus Stone and his grandiloquence; Burgess, with his affection for nineteenth-century Gothic architecture; Phil May, the diffident genius, with his wonderful lightning sketches

on a blackboard; Dudley Hardy, who did impersonations of any artist of any period; Herkomer with his showman proclivities; Brett and Walter Crane, full of socialistic fads; Caldecott, frankly naïve, wholesome and breezy; James Sant, always bland and delightful; Sidney Cooper, whose favourite remark, in a bass voice, was always, "Have you seen my boy Tom's pictures?" Ernest Crofts, with his popularity as the Keeper of the R.A. Schools, his Cromwellian military bearing, and his collection of cannons; Horsley, whose objection to studying from "the nude" won him the soubriquet at the hands of Whistler of "Clothes Horseley"; Yeames with his quaint and delicate humour; and Prinsep with his boisterous fun; Calderon with his superior "hidalgo" airs; Phil Morris, full of Bohemian bonhomie; Frith, the clever raconteur, the soul of gentleness; Poynter with his wonderful memory, and his acerbity of manner; Fred Eaton of "rule of thumb" methods; Oulesse the pocket Millais; innocent, astute, incorruptible Jackson and his "Oxford Schools"; Sir Arthur Blomfield, the genial and distinguished architect; Swan and his cocksureness; Onslow Ford with his powers of assimilation; Briton Riviere, the irreproachable and incorruptible; Solomon and Hacker, a twin-like constellation; G. D. Leslie and his artistic historical memories; Bodley the architect, reserved, but learned; Linnell and his oddities; Norman Shaw, the Father of a School.

This Arts Club, of which Gilbert became a member, was the R.A.'s dining-club, established for social purposes. The Committee who managed it arranged various dinners and entertainments in the country for the members. In those days the Club was in Tenterden Street, at the corner of Hanover Square, a fine house with ceilings decorated by Angelica Kauffmann, next door to the Royal Academy of Music, and the Travellers' Club was close by. A famous painter of that day was Brett, the R.A., a man of expansive artistic ideas and very narrow political ones. At a big dinner Gilbert was elected as Chairman in the following way: It was the custom after the guests arrived, whilst waiting for dinner to be announced, for the members to elect the Chairman for the evening. The dinner proceeded merrily, and when the first toast was proposed, which was always

to the King, it was drunk standing. Brett, obstinate in his socialistic opinions, remained seated. Gilbert looked at him, and quoted the words of a favourite song:

“He who would this toast deny—  
Down among the dead men—  
Down among the dead men—  
Let him lie.”

Instantly the members, sitting on each side, very skilfully lowered Brett under the table. Meanwhile, the others all took up the chorus, and he reappeared to the chant. He took it in good part, realising that it was useless to do anything else. One of that band of men, Orchardson, painted an unforgettable picture called “Gentlemen—the King!”—which was full of dignity, even pathos, for it showed the strength of an ideal, and all that loyalty meant.

Brett was a remarkable goldsmith, and produced some rings, full of naïveté and beauty of design, into which he infused the same colour as in his big seascapes. Gilbert always felt a strong bond of union with him and his art, and Brett reciprocated the feeling. Both gained inspiration when meeting at the Club. Brett asked his junior to visit his studio, and the latter always intended to see the inner workings of his wonderful craft; but he never found the time, much to his regret afterwards.

As it can be imagined, a great deal of good-natured banter was indulged in wherever these artists met who knew each other so well. Onslow Ford was often chaffed about his exquisite clothes, which, unlike those of the others, were in the latest fashion. He wore special collars and fronts, square-cut resplendent shoes, and gaiters, and specially cut suits. He was certainly a dandy, and was proud of his beautiful moustache.

One morning a number of artists were gathered together at the New Gallery, busily engaged in hanging pictures and placing statuary for a “Private View”. They then repaired to the luncheon room with the exception of Onslow Ford and Herkomer, who vanished together. Whilst the party were chatting over their coffee a man entered whom no one recognised. “Who’s that?” said one,

in an undertone. "A wild man," said another *sotto voce*, smiling. Presently the man addressed them, and finding no cordial response approached the table, and stood facing the light and his companions of the morning. They looked, then stared. "Herkomer?" at last said one doubtfully. Herkomer it was without his well-known beard and moustache, which he had just parted with, and the effect was unpleasing and unbecoming. His explanation was naïf. "What's the good of having a lip if you don't show it?" he said complacently. "That depends upon the quality of the lip," said one artist. Herkomer had rendered himself hideous, and his allies had hardly recovered from the shock when another stranger appeared. This proved to be Onslow Ford shorn of his moustache. He was greeted by laughter and cheers.

Gilbert's hat was often the subject of discussion. . . . He says, "I have always worn a hat different from other men's. Macbeth the painter had a fancy to imitate me in the matter of head-gear, and one day, having left the Club before me, he took my hat in mistake for his own. His peg was next to mine, and I took what I imagined was my own hat from my peg, when leaving the Club. Upon arriving home I hung it in its place, and I noted with satisfaction that its appearance seemed to reproach me for a want of confidence in its condition; it looked so spruce. I worked late into the night, for the next day I had to present a design for an important commission, and wakefulness was the penalty of my diligence. Early the next morning, when I would have slept, I was roused by a messenger wanting to see me on business. It was Macbeth's servant, carrying my hat as a ransom for his own which I had worn home. The next time we met at the Club, we tried to account for our hats having changed pegs, and came to the conclusion that someone had been examining both out of curiosity (for they invited observation, being quite unlike those of the others round them), and that they had been replaced on the wrong pegs. The Club servant heard of it and told us of what had happened a few days before. When Swinburne was leaving one evening, he could not find his hat. He always flew into a rage very easily, and on this occasion did a mad act. He quickly collected all the hats he could



SIR HENRY TATE.

Bronze bust, 1889. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1891. In the Library of the University of Liverpool.





find, threw them on the floor, *and danced on them*. The matter was reported to the Club authorities, and he was requested to resign his membership, which he did."

Gilbert adds, "I must have met Swinburne over and over again at the 'Arts' Club, where he was a frequent visitor, without knowing I was in the company of a great poet. I was very young at the time and saw no difference between any man and his like, unless a superman in every respect!"

Membership of other clubs followed. "After I became an R.A.," says Gilbert, "I was a Member of the Athenæum Club; but I went there only three times. I greatly preferred the Garrick. In one room at the Athenæum all the chairs would be filled with elderly gentlemen—sedate and solemn; then in the billiard-room a judge in shooting coat would be playing with a bishop in his apron and sleeves rolled up, shooting at the balls. Games and cards have never appealed to me, nor so-called sport; it seems only a waste of time to one who has art to pursue. Reading and music have always been my great recreations.

"The Garrick was much more to my taste, with its homely ways, and absence of formality. And the men who gathered there—Irvings, Toole, Hare, Tree, and many others now passed away—were endowed with a youthful spirit, whatever their ages might have been. In point of fact the actor remains perennially youthful and light-hearted. I was a member of the Savage and used to meet many delightful and congenial companions there.

"But though I went out to various festivities at this time, the summer of my life, I was never a clubman, nor fond of social gatherings. I have found my happiest hours in my home, and even at that time I infinitely preferred, and generally spent my evenings in the company of my ever-wonderful mother, when she would play to me by the hour, and charm the silence by the melody of her voice.

"We often played duets together, my father after a long and strenuous day resting from his labours, sometimes applauding our efforts. My mother knew the power of her music over me, and when I was engaged on the greatest work of my life, the Duke of

Clarence's Tomb, she would come to my studio and inspire me by the hour, as she played and sang whilst I was hard at work."

As a matter of fact Gilbert was always loath to leave his work. His companions at the Beaux Arts and in Rome had found it very difficult to get him to be present at their little social gatherings. "Gilbert was always very hard to dig out," his friend Mr. Lee once told me, when talking of their student days together. Apart from his disinclination for society, he was working tremendously hard, and when he had finished for the day he required just the right, reposeful atmosphere that he found in his mother's surroundings, when he could cast off the fatigue of many hours' brainwork, and start refreshed for the next day.

The great delight of the artist's life is that he lives entirely according to his own taste and fancy, always accompanied by his art. Routine is a thing abhorrent to his soul, and the advantage of his profession is that a new problem presents itself each day over his work. Hence he escapes boredom.

Life in his parents' home flowed along very harmoniously, full of variety and charm. Hospitality reigned, and the true aristocracy of brains gathered round there. Mrs. Gilbert was the centre of a large circle of friends and relatives, who were one and all devoted to her. Music and "form" were often discussed in the home, where every new production was known as well as they knew the composer; in fact, many a composition was brought for them to hear before it reached the public, to be analysed critically and with an intimate knowledge. In that little world of melody at Maida Vale his father would often turn to his mother for her opinion, which was equal to his own. When the family were alone together their hearts would be full of the dear one of infinite promise they had so recently lost, and a silence would come over them, during which they lived over again the strains of music he could invoke and seemed to see him as a little child standing at the piano, playing Handel and other composers from memory, and by ear. What might he not have done, what might he not have been if he had lived? Alas that "There is no fire-side, howsoe'er defended, but has one vacant chair".





*Photo. Hollyer*

MEMORIAL TO RANDOLPH CALDECOTT.

Aluminium, and flesh-colour patina, in onyx niche, 1890  
In the Crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. *Page 161.*



The loss to Gilbert was a grievous one. Though fifty years have passed, this brother, who was everything to him, is never far away from his thoughts.

In speaking of Victorian days Gilbert says that strict obedience to parental authority was practised; and when he lived with his parents as a married man he consulted his father's opinion, and deferred to him about most matters, though in such a personal matter as his marriage he had felt justified in taking his own way. Impetuous and strong-willed he has ever been, yet amenable to discipline by those who have won his affection and respect.

It was not until many years afterwards, and he had reached the time when man becomes retrospective in his thoughts, that he ever realised how carefully his father watched over him, even when he was abroad. After a lapse of fifty years an incident springs to his memory. In writing from Rome to his father he mentioned that a certain peer had called at his studio, but he was out. Closely following on his letter came a telegram: "Have nothing to do with person mentioned". This advice was acted upon, and subsequent disclosures made him grateful for his father's decisive action in the matter.

But a point of difference arose between them through his refusal to accept his father's counsel, whilst living at home. The latter perceived that he built up his work very rapidly, but took a long time to finish it. He, therefore, urged him to send off his commissions as quickly as possible, pointing out that delay on the sculptor's part meant nothing but loss to him. This Gilbert resolutely refused to consider, and the subject became a vexation of spirit to both, so that at last neither of them ever referred to it again. This led to a slight feeling of estrangement, for his father thought him obstinate, and he merely felt that his father could not enter into his difficulties. His mother understood him better, and realised his reason for upholding what was a strong principle to him. Though she never sided with him against his father, by her silence and tactful sympathy she helped him. But the day came when his father reversed his decision. The great memorial to the Duke of Clarence was nearly ready, and

his father, though very ill, went to Windsor to see it, being wheeled in a chair into the Chapel Royal, where he was overcome completely by its sublimity, dignity, and pathos. He soon sought his son and made an admission. "I was mistaken. I now see that I was wrong in my advice. I did not understand. You were right, my boy, right."

This strengthened Gilbert greatly in upholding a principle he has never swerved from, against much opposition from certain clients and friends. He has lost all along the line by doing so, made enemies, and alienated those who know nothing of art, nor of the artist's mentality. He says that a work of his is never finished by any date or time, and he never can tell when he will have done with it; since it only finishes when he has done all that his vision tells him is required.

The greatest difficulty in Gilbert's life has always been his inability to finish his work at the dictation of his clients. It has proved nothing less than a tragedy to him, an insurmountable one, too; for it is not merely that he cannot produce his work to any given time, but that he wills not to do so, it being a deep-rooted principle based upon conviction that his way is the right and only way for him to work. And he is right. The noblest tree in the forest takes the deepest root, and requires the longest time to grow, that successive generations may enjoy its grateful shade.

Great art, likewise, is a thing of gradual growth; what springs up in a night withers away with equal rapidity. It is certain that "The Last Judgment", in the Sistine Chapel at Rome, would never have gained the power it has, nor have lived for all time, if Michael Angelo had meekly obeyed Pope Julius the Second, who came day by day, taunting and threatening him, because he had not finished his work. "When will you finish it?" was his parrot-cry. "When I have done with it," said Michael Angelo. Julius was so enraged that he said he would order the artist to be thrown down from the scaffolding. On another occasion he struck him; all because he was too stupid to realise that he was dealing with a prince of artists, as superior to the Pope as light is to darkness. Angelo was one who could neither be coerced nor flattered into disobeying his ideals

concerning his loyalty to art. With him stand in history a whole host of men such as Leonardo da Vinci, whose masterpiece, "Mona Lisa", took four years to produce; Verrochio, accused of taking money for commissions and wasting his time; and Rembrandt, who was regularly besieged by impatient clients. The last was sorely in need of money, hemmed in by financial difficulties, when a well-disposed but stupid friend called upon him and asked when his work would be completed. Rembrandt replied: "An artist's work is finished when he has done it".

All men who refuse to part with their ideals and to barter their souls for gain have a similar experience. These men are the Great Masons of the world, holding the torch of truth high, and Gilbert treads very closely in their footsteps, carrying on the highest traditions of art. An analogy may be found between his experiences and Angelo's. The latter, driven to desperation, fled to France, and only returned to Rome rather than allow a war to be declared against the city harbouring him. The tomb he was engaged to make for the tyrannical Pope was never executed by him, and Rome was the loser by more than one art treasure in consequence.

Gilbert fled from England leaving certain work unfinished, because he was hampered and worried on every side by impossible conditions for a really great artist. The inference is clear. When a superman is born into an age marked by mediocrity in art, the country that produces him should cherish his genius, not only exalt and praise his efforts, but ensure his freedom from all mundane anxieties for his lifetime; and, having given him a free hand, leave him in peace to work out his creations. He might have enriched his native land with many more works of art if he had been treated as an artist should be: that is to say, given his own time and entirely his own way of producing his ideas in plastic form. There should be no honour too great for a country to pay the man who can lift up the thought of the world into the highest realm of beauty and ideality.

No one can build up a figure or groups of figures more swiftly than this artist, who requires no models. The sketch model of the Tomb at Windsor was done in three days, with its multitude of

figures. Many a sculptor would be content to send forth his work as complete in this stage. Not so Gilbert. Now was the time to begin to enrich and make it perfect—to correct and often to change whole passages as the mood seized him.

Time! What is time in relation to a work of art for all time? If Gilbert's only work had been the magnificent tomb at Windsor, that alone would have placed him amongst the immortals. Now consider the other side—the quick producer. Boehm, a man who gauged the taste of the fashionable world, made his lightning and clever sketch portraits in two hours, delighted his clients and became very rich. But where are the numberless equestrian portraits and busts he turned out with the rapidity of a batch of hot cakes from an oven? Where is his name? Where his reputation as an artist? Forgotten. He worked for the day, not for posterity.

The pupil and friend was cast in a different mould to that of his master. He has never been able to understand how money can tempt an artist to produce quickly. He has ever been his own star, displeased several clients, and is unrepentant still; for his conscience is clear, and he is a poor man to-day, because he lacks all worldly wisdom.





*Photo. Hollyer*

THE SHAFTESBURY MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN.

Unveiled in Piccadilly Circus by the Duke of Westminster, June 29, 1899.  
A contemporary photograph. *Chapter VIII.*





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PICCADILLY CIRCUS FOUNTAIN



ONDON has fewer good pieces of public statuary than almost any capital in Europe. Of the many statues that exist in London there are some that might be termed technically good, but certainly not great. There is a wide distinction between the placid presentment of that which is merely reminiscent of what has been done a hundred times before, and the work of art which can touch the heart, appeal to the imagination, convey a thrill of exaltation to the spirit, and lead to a welling forth of ideas in the beholder.

This power is the great artist's gift to mankind; and in this class of supreme merit there are only two examples in London: the statue of Charles I. in Trafalgar Square, the work of a Frenchman, and the Fountain in Piccadilly Circus. I have known people who have said that they never passed through Piccadilly Circus without stopping to view the Fountain again and yet again. Each time it taught them something new, and, like the first sweet breath of springtime, brought them a message of hope and joy: for joy is the essence of this inspired work.

Many years have passed since its erection,<sup>1</sup> and people have known neither its tragic history nor its true significance. While a statue becomes a landmark, the artist who produced it is often overlooked; and the fashioner, in this case reticent and sensitive, has kept silence for long years on a subject abounding in sorrow to him. He now unfolds the whole story.

"Lord Shaftesbury", he says, "had been sitting to Boehm for one of his marvellous portraits. I had seen him constantly, but did not know him. He was closely associated with other benevolent men given to carrying out great schemes; amongst these were Mr. R.

<sup>1</sup> The Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain was unveiled in 1893. In 1924 the reconstruction of the underground railway station beneath Piccadilly Circus necessitated its removal.

Williams, Rob Roy McGregor, and General Gordon. After Lord Shaftesbury's death it was proposed to erect a memorial to him. I had just returned to England, and was working in a studio in the Fulham Road, adjoining Boehm's, and he gave me many commissions, for he was one of the most large-hearted men I have met, ever ready to help his brother artists.

"In order to do me a service, he told the Committee that he would be unable to have the honour of carrying out the tribute to one he so greatly admired; but he was sure that his former pupil would amply justify the liberty he was taking in proposing him to the Committee; but he would not answer as to what form his young friend would suggest for the memorial, for his aspirations were slightly above those he himself, unfortunately, did not possess, and that anything approaching what is known as the 'coat-and-trousers' style, would, if insisted upon, lead to his pupil's instant renunciation of so important and tempting an appointment.

"I was in my studio one day when my old friend and master, who was in the habit of looking in about lunch-time, made his appearance with two strangers, Rob Roy McGregor and Mr. R. Williams. They opened by saying Boehm would place at my disposal the bust of Lord Shaftesbury, and the commission to do the work was formally offered me. I replied, 'I can't undertake the statue of Lord Shaftesbury; I prefer something that will symbolise his life's work'. The life of Lord Shaftesbury lent itself to that, rather than the glorification of the tailor; besides, the sum mentioned emboldened me to suggest such an undertaking, being more than three times what I had asked for a simple statue.

"My visitors seemed undecided, and I knew it was quite possible they would give a decision against me, had not Boehm, with his usual suavity and kindness, relieved me of any further care in the discussion by a most emphatic and enthusiastic upholding of my views, ending, with his usual modesty, by excusing his vehemence on the ground that he was not proposing more than he felt justified in doing. He finished with the quotation: "*Finis coronat opus.*"

"The meeting concluded with mutual assurances—they saying





JAMES PRESCOTT JOULE.  
Marble statue, 1890. In the Town Hall, Manchester.  
By permission of the Manchester Town Hall Committee.



that with such a recommendation they were encouraged to place the matter before the Committee and to suggest me as the artist to the fullness of their power—I, on my part, giving my promise that I would make every endeavour to deserve their confidence by producing a work that was worthy. By a certain date a sketch of the Fountain would be ready for the Committee.

“We parted mutually satisfied; whilst I was jubilant. Before I had had time to collect my thoughts, Boehm burst in again, and I thought he meant to dance round my studio: ‘At last—at last!’ he said. ‘We must try to reverse that saying of Marochetti’s, “For those who worship Gibson anything is good enough!” Now my dear boy, put your shoulder to the wheel, and it is the Wheel of Fortune for you!’ After appointing me to meet him for our usual walk at 6 P.M., after our work was over, he departed.

“This was about 2 P.M., and I had four hours before me, and as, at that time, I enjoyed the entire use of my studio without the adornment of an assistant, I went feverishly to work to embody on a small scale in clay a transient impression of what I intended to do, an impression I had received during the interview. Being full of ardour to deserve well of my friend’s disinterested and enthusiastic behaviour, I determined to get something into shape before he found me at 6 P.M.

“I was hardly conscious of what I had been doing during the hours which had slipped away, or even of any thought as to the effect that my effort might produce, when suddenly Boehm appeared, evidently expecting to find me waiting. He saw me in shirt sleeves bespattered with clay.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘it’s good news after all—famous!’ And he rubbed his hands with ‘invisible soap’, as was his way. ‘I suppose you’ll be beginning this to-morrow, when you have had a night to decide on what you contemplate?’

“‘My dear Boehm,’ I said, ‘don’t be shocked or surprised. I have done some work, in rough shape, which embodies the thought that passed through my mind. Much as I would like to show it to you, it is insufficiently advanced to convey to anyone else what I mean it to be.’

"Then, seeing him look disappointed, I hastily added, 'But I know you will be lenient and understand how it is. Tell me frankly your opinion.' I then showed it to him.

"*'Gott in Himmel!'* he cried. 'You surprise me. Do you mean to say you have done this thing since we parted?'

"'Yes. My dear chap, you know something about horses, and that a good shoe is only made in few "heats". I felt on that principle that unless I tapped my brain while it was hot, I should get but a poor fashioning in clay of an idea quite otherwise born.'

"I have never seen him more deeply moved. 'Don't touch it again. Don't touch it!' he cried excitedly. 'I will write immediately to the Committee and ask for an early day, as you have already realised your idea for their service. There is nothing like despatch in these matters.'

"We left for the Athenæum, our usual walk, and he entered, as was his habit between the ending of his work and dinner; while I found my way to my dear mother. Needless to speak of the evening of joyous and affectionate converse we passed together; for she was my confidante, adviser, and best friend. Together we built castles in the air, and, my pleasure being to give her joy, we were the happiest mortals on the face of the earth.

"The model was finished in three months, and it took the same time to be cast in bronze. In nine months the work was completed. For the sum I received I could do the whole thing; but the Government said they would give me old guns to be melted down for metal—a promise that was not kept. Then I had to deal with a 'corner' in copper, which would have brought my operations to a deadlock, if I had submitted to it; but in confidence that the venture would be covered eventually, I decided upon proceeding with the work, purchasing the metal at the high price it had risen to, rather than allow my moulds, that were all ready for casting into, to suffer, or incur delay with the Committee.

"I felt Mr. R. Williams, although satisfied with my design, still had a hankering for some effigy representing Lord Shaftesbury to form part of it, and the Board of Works insisted that it should be

surrounded by a parapet. I was anxious to humour Mr. Williams's earnest desire, and I offered, with Boehm's approval and his bust, to make a canopied tablet for the inscription which I thought I could introduce on this parapet. It was put up, and there followed a fearful howl against the parapet and addition I had made.

"The eight very elaborate drinking-cups I had supplied to the eight basins, with hand-made chains, were stolen during the first night after the unveiling, and it is not surprising that I then decided to bow my first and last time to Public Opinion, which numbered a considerable portion of my brother sculptors.

"I took down the bust and parapet, and presented the former to Mr. Williams. I then hoped to become immune from all care on account of my first London-born effort. But this was not to be; for from that time onward, I was worried in every direction over a work entered upon with high hopes and aspirations; until I learnt to regard the Fountain as my 'Evil Genius' instead of the sympathetic 'Waters of Lethe'.

"I was so exasperated by the Committee of the Board of Works that I remember I sent them the following message, now many years ago: 'There is more than £3000 worth of copper. Take it down, melt it, turn it into pence, and give it to the unfortunate people who nightly find a resting-place on the Thames Embankment, to the everlasting shame and disgrace of the greatest metropolis in the world, and cease torturing an artist.'"

But Gilbert says nothing about his monetary loss. He received the sum of £3000 for the Fountain, which cost him over £7000, and this was the beginning of his financial difficulties, from which he was never able to free himself whilst living in London.

One classical author says of the producer: "They praise him and leave him to starve". Alas! There have been countless examples of the truth of these words. This artist was only just on the threshold of his magnificently great career, and was taxing his energies beyond his strength to accomplish a work designed for all time; and it was a still harder task on account of his youth and inexperience. He had a delicate wife and children to provide for, and many expenses to meet

inseparable from starting life in London. He certainly was not in a position to make a present to the authorities of this work of art, and in addition to expend on it a further sum of over £3500. His only guerdon was a storm of criticism and abuse. He made a mistake in yielding to the many foolish counsellors who beset his path; and, in trying to please all parties against his own judgment, he failed to satisfy anyone.

Boehm always longed for the day when Gilbert's Fountain would be erected; but he died before it was half-way through. Had Boehm lived, matters would have been entirely different. He would have watched, advised, and seen him safely through all difficulties, and he would never have allowed anyone to divert his pupil's original intention from its evident, natural tendency.

Gilbert said some years later: "I am grateful for the experience of its teaching, which proved more beneficial than anything I could have derived from the unqualified praise of the unattached critic. Moreover, I have had the gratification of hearing, from sources whence emanated the hardest knocks, that the work has begun to gather estimation, and is beginning to be understood far more easily than my own handwriting."

Critics have never ventured to vent their spleen on Gilbert's other works; and by this time the public have learnt to discount their opinions on art, when, after a lapse of years the fraternity are united in the highest praise of the same Fountain they formerly condemned. It was only one of a series of foolish blunders they have made, and are continually adding to, as in the case of the trial over the reputed Romney, when critics of high standing gave written testimonies (for which they were highly paid) to the genuineness of a perfectly worthless picture.

Their criticisms of Gilbert's work showed that they knew nothing of the craft, nor of his craftsmanship. Only recently my attention has been drawn to a statement in a journal, in which the writer said that Gilbert used the structure of birds' wings in his work, and plastered them over with clay! And this critic actually thought he was writing in praise of a great master's ingenious method of model-

ling! Had the writer ever done any modelling, he would have realised that he was suggesting a childish and impossible thing. If an artist wanted to make a complete failure of his work and qualify for a lunatic asylum, he might set himself just such a difficulty as he could never hope to overcome. Gilbert seldom used models, having all the knowledge of "form" at his fingers' ends. Critics who wish to write about sculpture should understand its craftsmanship before doing so. One of the reasons why the critics condemned the Fountain was because it was new; they had never seen anything like it. The symbolism was lost upon them, and the treatment proved beyond their limited knowledge.

The acrimony displayed towards the Fountain by certain artists was due to jealousy of a younger man, and one who they saw was their superior. The question was asked why the commission should have been given to him, instead of to one of them. The answer is to be found in the Fountain itself. Jealousy is said to be "cruel as the grave", and small artists are not free from it. They joined in condemnation in the same spirit which prompted George Morland to refuse to teach James Ward painting, his excuse being that, if he did so, "Jemmy would go too far". "Time brings its little revenge," said Gilbert in 1903, "for I had what might have been the pleasure (had I been malicious) of seeing my own work imitated, not to say travestied in detail, in many works given to the Public." It would be difficult to say who has not imitated his work. I could quote many instances of so-called friends who did not disdain to borrow his ideas and use them to their own ends.

It has always been the fashion to decry the public's taste in art; but this has not been borne out in the instance of the Fountain. As a rule they are tentative about expressing their opinions, feeling that art criticism is outside their province; but, if the critics leave them unbiassed, experience goes to prove that the London public have good taste and form a sound judgment in such matters. They have never been attracted by the monstrosities perpetrated by Bolsheviks in art—whether Cubist, Vorticist, or any other asinine school.

Hatton said with truth: "It is more or less of a paradox that



Gilbert's symbolism never seems to lose touch of a certain human symbolism that is able to realise to the least intellect the full significance and beauty of his highest work of imagination. Whilst lifting a subject to the supreme platform of poetic imagination, he has the subtle power of linking it with a reality which brings the noblest art down to the humblest understanding. You find this in everything he has ever done, from a brooch to a drinking-cup, from an official chain of office to the centre-piece for the great Queen's table; from a baptismal font to an altar-screen; from a domestic group to the magnificent memorial to the Duke of Clarence."

When, in 1924, the public knew that the Fountain was to be moved, all classes expressed their feelings. A message from the flower-girls was wafted across the water from London to Bruges; and this touched the heart of the artist more than anything else. "We love the fountain," they said. "If it is moved, what we want to know is, when will it come back? If they take it away, we ought to go in a procession every week and visit it. We shan't rest till it's brought back. We consider it 'our fountain'." A wistful tribute was this, coming from those without education, who yet felt its influence and beauty, while inarticulate to express why they loved it. When the workmen came with their implements to take the Fountain down the flower-girls were greatly distressed. I received the following account of what happened from one who was present.

"Here's a pretty state of things," said one lady, tossing her head. "What are we going to do without it, I'd like to know." "Our luck's gorn now," said a sad-looking person—a veritable Mrs. Gummidge, wearing a mortified bonnet. "They'll never bring it back, and what's going to become of us then?" "Forty years I've been beside it," murmured an elderly woman. "It's like a death in the family. They didn't ought to take it away."

On one of his rare visits to London years ago, Gilbert went to inspect the Fountain, and was stooping down examining the base when a man of the coster type interrupted him. "Erc, Guvnor," he said, "might I ask what you're a-doing of with our Fountain? I've watched you nozing abaht. What're after, Guvnor?" The artist

raised his head and looked at his questioner kindly, "I made it," he said briefly. "You did!" said the man. "I ask yer pardon, Guvnor. I only spoke because I didn't want nothing to 'appen to our Fountain. We calls it 'ours'! Shake 'ands, Guvnor. No offence meant, and I'm prahd to have met yer." Then he turned back and said confidentially, "I thought yer was one of them 'nosey Parkers' after no good, and we don't want nothing to 'appen to our Fountain." Is there any other public memorial which has been taken into the hearts of the people and the poor in London as this one?

The public viewing the Fountain with pride and delight little dream of the cost in mental and physical energy to the man who fashioned it: built up as it was, with the sweat of body and brain, informed by the artist's temperament. They little know what a number of people he had to encounter—architects, surveyors, lawyers, committees, officials, Boards of Work and workmen; finally the critics and the public. The subscribers entrusted the work to a young man of renown, yet the Board of Works and the committee hampered him in his design by their interference. Gilbert never intended the base to be in such proximity to the rest of his work; but when it was nearly completed, he was asked to alter it. He was worried by a thousand and one technical questions and restrictions; and, though he desired this site, he was not told till it was finished where his work would stand. The site was an impossible shape, square to nothing of its surroundings, a distorted triangle.

He chose the base in the form of an octagon to suit any shape, which overcame this difficulty. He intended the Fountain to be six feet higher, with a large supply of water distributed from jets at all the salient points in various shapes and forms. Imagine, with his sense of decoration, how beautiful the ever-changing shapes and forms of the water would have been, upwards, downwards, inwards, and crosswards—indeed in every direction, creating a perpetual cascade round the part originally formed to receive it, a large basin, in the space now occupied by steps. It is incredible that the authorities should have been so blind to the interests of the great city they represented as to refuse the artist even the supply of water, with the

pitifully mean excuse that it would cost the ratepayers too much. What can be thought of the intelligence or taste of the Board of Works in erecting a fountain without water? What would our continental neighbours think of such an excuse? In Paris and in Rome one of the great attractions in the streets and gardens is the ever-abundant rise and fall of showers of crystal water, sparkling in the sunshine.

"When the site was selected," Gilbert goes on to say, "the present surrounding great buildings were not in existence, and the environment was constantly open to alterations. When the Fountain was unveiled there were eight drinking-cups of more or less elaborate fashion, secured by a very carefully hand-wrought chain specially designed and made for the purpose. The next morning only two of the cups were left, but the fragments of a third were found broken and deposited in one of the basins, carrying clear evidence that the damage had taken some time to effect, and was no doubt meant as a malicious protest against the work itself. I believe subsequently the Council recovered much of the missing material: a further proof that the damage was not done for the sake of theft."

Things that disgrace the authorities of a city are apt to be quickly forgotten in the hurry of modern life. Nevertheless they form permanent monuments to wrongs done to individuals, seen in their true perspective only when events become past history. Then public scandals, injustices, and unredressed wrongs live again. This was the case with Alfred Stevens, and a parallel may be drawn between his experience and Alfred Gilbert's; for both were the victims of gross ignorance and stupidity. Alfred Stevens's noble work was slighted and insulted by the Dean of St. Paul's, who refused to place it in St. Paul's Cathedral on the ground that he considered the horse a pagan animal: an action approved by the narrow-minded of his day. The Wellington Statue now occupies a prominent place in the Cathedral, and a special room in the Tate Gallery contains the sculptor's few works; while a bust of the once-despised master, wrought by the late Professor Lanteri, looks down upon his handiwork. Alas! Stevens's requiem ought to be "Too Late". This tardy



*Photo. Hellyer*

MEMORIAL TO FRANCIS MONTAGU HOLL, R.A.  
Bronze bust, 1890. In the Crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral





act of repentance did him no good whatever; for he never knew in his lifetime that his name would be honoured.

Commercialism and the artistic spirit are incompatible. This is a commonplace, but true. Commerce depends on rapid changes of fashion. Art is eternal. Commerce produces wealth for those engaged in it; Art, as a rule, poverty for its votaries, but always an asset for its patrons.

The history of Art proves this. Torrigiano, the maker of Henry VII.'s Tomb at Westminster Abbey, fell a victim to the Inquisition: Michael Angelo, of indomitable purpose in spite of long persecution, accomplished his own will and left to posterity a marvellous heritage of art: Holbein had to flee his country for making a too faithful portrait: Perugino was paid for his immortal work in sacks of corn and other comestibles: Rembrandt was thrice bankrupt: his work is now a fortune to those who possess it: Mozart was buried in a pauper's grave by night, and all trace of his resting-place is lost; but his music yields fortunes: Beethoven, but for the English music-loving public, might have fared the same as Mozart: one work of his, the Ninth Symphony, is an income to those who helped him in need: Alfred Stevens died, broken-hearted, before his superb monument to Wellington was erected: the work is now priceless, worthy to vie with the greatest sculptures of other countries.

## CHAPTER IX

### LIFE IN LONDON



GILBERT continued to work at the Fulham Road studio with more commissions than he could well fulfil. He missed Boehm, whose sudden death, before the completion of the work he had set his heart upon seeing, the Piccadilly Circus Fountain, left a sad sense of loss to his friend. Had Boehm lived, it is certain Gilbert's career would have been quite different. The older man's knowledge of the world would have stood the latter in good stead. He would have championed his rights and secured fair play.

Gilbert exhibited "The Enchanted Chair" at the Royal Academy in 1886. It met with unbounded admiration, and unqualified praise. Letters and telegrams flowed in from many artists and from the public, congratulating him on his achievement. Nor was appreciation wanting in the Press. The *Figaro* said:

"It would not be easy to commend too warmly the remarkable group which Mr. Alfred Gilbert exhibits, 'The Magic Chair'. If it were the practice at the R.A., as at the Salon, to award a medal of honour for the best work of art in the exhibition, I should unhesitatingly vote for its bestowal on the young sculptor who has, by his striking work, at once made an artistic reputation. It arrests the attention and appeals irresistibly to the imagination. The grim old cagle, perched on the back of the magic seat, with outstretched wings spread out like a canopy: the victim who has sunk down into the chair in a deathlike slumber, fanned by the bird's pinions, the scaly wings of the uncanny creatures that wind about the victim's feet, alike hold and impress the fancy. It is not alone what Mr. Gilbert has shown us in his powerful work: it is the weird, the mystic, the unhallowed possibilities which a long look at it suggests. It would be most interesting to see how the effect of this daring group might be

enhanced were it taken out from its commonplace and Philistine surroundings and isolated—as for instance, the President's able bronze statue is isolated—in the Lecture Room. It is useless to ask the authorities to take such an unprecedented step; but it would be an act of graceful justice to a young man who has done so much to redeem the character of the Exhibition from aggravated mediocrity."

This critic, evidently sincere in his whole-hearted appreciation, yet strikes me as having failed to grasp the inner meaning of the symbolic truth "The Magic Chair" expresses so wonderfully. But any great work of art is open to many interpretations, and one of the proofs of its greatness is that each observer has his own rendering of it. Hence the diversity of opinions about the same work of art. But as to the sublimity of "The Magic Chair" all united to agree.

"My statue, 'The Enchanted Chair'," writes Gilbert himself, "was the outcome of my desire to eschew material expression in art, and to give play to the romantic side, which is too often omitted in sculpture. I regarded it as high praise when a critic pronounced me 'too picturesque in my ideal'. I smile when I contrast it with the earliest criticisms I received. Mr. Riley used to see our childish drawings when he came to see my father, and one day I showed him an extremely prosaic little house I had drawn, with doors and windows painstakingly put in, and smoke issuing from a chimney. 'Capital!' said the old man. 'Why I can smell the beefsteak and onions.' Perhaps it was the absence of this odour that the critics missed. 'The Enchanted Chair' was only executed in plaster. I intended doing it in marble, but when misfortunes pursued me, the foundations being laid through undertaking the Piccadilly Circus Fountain, I broke it up, at the last hour, before leaving my home in Maida Vale, with other works partly finished, because I could not bear them being owned by strangers, who were quite capable of giving my works to others to complete."

The portrait bust of Mr. Cyril Flower, M.P., afterwards Lord Battersca, was executed and exhibited at the R.A. the same year. Of this the *Morning Post* wrote: "The work in the whole gallery which we can praise with the most entire unreserve is the small

bronze head by Alfred Gilbert, to the noble qualities of which we called attention before: our prophecy of his future has been already in a measure fulfilled by the selection of his design for the Baroness Fahlenburg's mortuary chapel. He first attracted attention by his 'Kiss of Victory'. His work, we believe, is in Rome; but it is easy to see he has gained his inspiration, not from the facile mannerisms of the modern Italian sculptors, but from the great men of the past, from antiquity and from Michael Angelo. In that best school he has studied, whilst retaining his fullest independence. By this one small work, a simple head in bronze, charged with imagination, he has placed himself at one step with the foremost sculptors of our day."

The *Spectator* paid the following tribute: "Alfred Gilbert, who has more genius, and perhaps we might truly say more knowledge, than all the other young sculptors put together, sends one small portrait bust. The artist does not care for doing portraits, he prefers to give loose rein to his imagination and skill in the far more difficult ideal work, such as 'The Enchanted Chair'."

Whilst on a visit to Mr. Cyril Flower in Hertfordshire, Gilbert met Gladstone at a luncheon party. The latter engaged him in earnest conversation, leaning forward and absorbing all that was said about the mysteries of bronze-founding. Encouraged by the thirst for knowledge displayed by the Grand Old Man, Gilbert described the whole process, and Gladstone, in his courteous old-world fashion, thanked him for his "exceedingly entertaining company".

Shortly afterwards, he was dining at Lady Dorothy Nevill's, and there was Gladstone, the lion amongst the lions. He was, as usual, in a talkative mood, and when the ladies had retired to the drawing-room, he introduced the subject of bronze-founding, and repeated, word for word, to an admiring audience the information he had received, beginning with "Astonishing how many crafts, etc.". It was a complete dishing-up of Gilbert's conversation at Cyril Flower's. When he finished, Chamberlain said in eulogistic tones, "Really, Gladstone, you know everything". "Well," said the G.O.M. modestly, "I make it my business to know."

One thing he did not know was that the original source of his gramophone-like performance, his "record", in point of fact, was sitting at the table, chuckling to himself, and thinking how a man reveals himself when he talks. This incident shows Gladstone in his true character: always observant, of retentive memory, and accustomed to be the centre of attraction. Evidently his second meeting with Gilbert subconsciously suggested the theme of bronze-founding; but he had forgotten where he had acquired his information.

Mrs. Gladstone, in her quiet way, completely subjugated her famous husband, and he showed another side of his character in his child-like confidence and obedience to her. In the midst of one of his unending conversations she would touch him on the shoulder and say gently, "Time for bed, dear". Instantly he would rise and be led away; the lion transformed into a lamb. The Gladstones and Chamberlain often attended Lady Dorothy Nevill's famous Sunday afternoon gatherings, where Gilbert frequently met them.

About this period Irving and Ellen Terry were holding large audiences spellbound at the Lyccum, and "first nights" used to attract not only the students of the Royal Academy, but the Academicians; for Sir Henry's art was more than that of the interpreter, he was a creator in that he often made an entirely different rendering, and a far better one than the writer of the play ever dreamed of. Gilbert made the acquaintance of Irving and his friend Toole, and in speaking of the former says:

"Irving has been criticised for certain minor defects—his stiff gait, his indistinct utterances, etc.; but he was not only a great actor, but a *far* greater man. He lived by day the part he played by night. He was Cardinal Wolsey all the time the piece was on. He got inside the part, so to speak, and became the real man he portrayed."

One day he sat and mused and rubbed his chin. Then he asked Gilbert, "Ever thought of the boards, Alfred? Er—er——?"

"What boards, Henry?" said Gilbert innocently.

"Would you like to try your hand at acting? Take a part of walking on—er—er?"

His young friend did not know. He said he would consult his



father. Irving gave him a box for thirteen nights to see him play *Richard the Third* and *Alfred Jingle*. At the end of the time Gilbert was completely stage-struck, anxious to give up art and become an actor. He consulted his father, whose reply was disconcerting. "By no means will I ever hear of it!" So that concluded the matter; for the son had a great respect for his father's opinion.

Toole and Irving called him "Our Baby". He was so very much their junior, and they both loved him. Toole said his features were so mobile that he would excel on that account alone. He has undoubtedly histrionic gifts, and a dramatic element is shown in his works. Yet it would have been a thousand pities if he had yielded to Irving's desire and his own transitory impulse to follow another profession, in which, however, I cannot think he would have remained long, for he is an artist born, and not an actor by predilection.

Gilbert says that Irving was quite kingly in his generosity. He remembers an incident that abundantly proved this trait in his character. Mansfield, a clever actor, was running the same play, *Richard the Third*, at the Globe in opposition to Irving's *Richard* at the Lyceum. One night, before the play began, Mansfield was intercepted by a bailiff, who prevented him from continuing until his bill was paid. It was for a very large sum. Mansfield, driven to desperation, sent a hasty note to Irving, telling him the whole circumstances. The great actor read it, stroked his chin, musing as was his wont. Then he said, half aloud: "A brother actor in difficulties". A pause, then he turned to his secretary, "Have you the cheque-book handy? Write a cheque for a thousand, an open one, and send it at once." This was done, the debt was paid, and that night Mansfield's receipts were greater than Irving's. This gracious act was to a man who had set himself to outrival him in the same part.

Toole and Irving were bosom friends and were often to be seen walking about London together. Once they strolled up Bond Street and round Piccadilly. Irving paused before a shop and regarded a curious walking-stick with deep interest. "What do you think of this?" he inquired of Toole, who merely murmured something that sounded like "Um—eh!" Then they came to another shop with an

antique silver tankard displayed in the window. This time, Toole asked Irving's opinion of it, and received a similar grunt in reply. They said no more, the friends parted, Irving going later to rehearsal at the Lyceum and Toole to the little theatre in King William Street. Irving found the walking-stick waiting him, "With love from William", and Toole the tankard, "With Henry's love". They had neatly exchanged their offerings.

Amongst Gilbert's good friends was Joseph Hatton the writer—the author of his "Life" for the *Art Journal*. Hatton and his wife lived in Maida Vale, and were a devoted couple. One morning at an early hour, Gilbert was told that Mr. Hatton wished to see him at once. He was surprised at the visit, having supped at their house on the previous evening. He dressed hastily, and found his friend haggard and distraught beyond words. Gilbert urged him to tell him his trouble. At last, in broken accents, he faltered out that his wife had died an hour since, and Gilbert, seeing he was quite incapable of doing anything, accompanied him to his desolate home. There she lay on a sofa, having passed away suddenly from heart-failure. Gilbert took upon himself to carry out all the sad ceremonies attendant upon death, full of sorrow at the ending of his friend's life-happiness.

Joseph Hatton did not long survive his wife. This was his life's second tragedy. The first came when husband and wife were giving an evening party. A telegram was handed in that fell like a thunder-bolt. Their only son had died suddenly in Buenos Aires.

Hatton and Irving were friends. One night at the Lyceum, Hatton had a man sitting behind him who talked loudly whilst the play was going on. Hatton expostulated, whereon the man used insulting language, ending by calling him a Jew. Hatton furiously turned round and struck him on the face with such violence that the man collapsed and had to be carried out.

Afterwards, Hatton went behind the scenes, and found Irving very much annoyed at the disturbance.

"What were you doing to-night, Joe?" said Irving gravely. Hatton explained, adding with some warmth, "Now what would you have

done, Henry?" Irving considered, then said slowly, "I should have killed him!"

A little recollection of Irving and Toole is given by Gilbert: "The night before the unveiling of the Fountain I was dining at the Garrick Club in the company of an unusually full gathering of habitués of the supper-room, after the theatres were closed. Most of these were only known to me by sight; but the chosen few I loved were all present: Irving, Toole, Wyndham, Tree, Hare, Bouchier, Fred Leslie, and a host of others I cannot name with certainty. I believe Bancroft, Grossmith, Corney Grain, and Forbes Robertson were present, and last, but not least, my distinguished namesake, Sir John Gilbert. It was a merry though dignified gathering, as befitted the demeanour of men who lived by reason of their daily efforts to instruct, amuse, and elevate, by means of their personal gifts, their less gifted fellow-men.

"With the morrow's ceremony of my work's public presentation well advertised, I became the hero of the moment, the victim of special interest, and had to listen to many questions and reply to them. Midnight came, one o'clock and two passed quickly away, and at last Irving, Toole, and I only remained.

"Irving had his chambers in a house bordering Bond Street, Toole lived near me in Maida Vale, but nearer the end of the Vale. A cab was hailed in which we three loyal friends ensconced ourselves, on a journey homewards. I remember Irving's sympathetic tact when giving directions to our driver that Piccadilly Circus was to be our first objective.

"The eve of every important occasion in my life has always cost me a whole night's vigil. This was an exceptionally agitated one, for I had a great stake at hazard, and felt far from confident as to the result of my venture. When we arrived at Piccadilly Circus it was suddenly illumined by the light of daybreak, and on alighting from our carriage we found a little army of men busily engaged in removing the palisade which had enclosed my work during the operations; for by the morning all scaffolding had to disappear, leaving only an artfully contrived canvas covering to the work, so arranged that by a slight pull upon a slender cord the whole fabric would fall to the





*Photo. Hollyer*

ALFRED GILBERT AT WORK IN THE LONDON STUDIO OF MR. SEYMOUR LUCAS.  
From the painting by J. Seymour Lucas, R.A., 1891.



ground and reveal the solution of a long-sustained mystery. This well-preserved secret had been safeguarded by the founders, Mr. George Broad and his sons, who were kindly and sympathetic.

"The appearance of three men in evening dress was not likely to inspire much confidence in the night watchman, to whom I was unknown, despite my assurance that I was the author of the work and wished to show my friends a private view. The moment of general disorder and during the last frantic efforts of men to be ready in time was ill-chosen; but it appealed to my friends, who as actor-managers, were accustomed to similar difficulties.

"The Fountain is octagonal, and I thought it only necessary to uncover one-eighth of its drapery to give my friends an idea of its entirety when repeated eight times. I was extremely nervous. Irving was, as usual, calm; but I felt it was more affected than real, and that he had observed my emotion and intended to reassure me by his example. Toole was wittily humorous and had assumed the character of exuberant youth, and sought, by descending to my level to cheer me by an attitude more fitting to my age. But on that eventful morning I must have presented myself to his keenly observant eyes as one aged prematurely by transient anxiety.

"Both these great actors were not only Artists but *Grands Seigneurs* as well. I cherish their memory and of those delightful hours I spent with them after the strain of our daily exercise of different callings."

There were many friendly gatherings at the Garrick Club, on which Gilbert looks back with a smile and a sigh, for most of that gay throng have passed away. At the last party that he gave there were present Irving, Toole, Beerbohm Tree, Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Joseph Hatton, and a host of others. The menu was chosen with discretion; and the salad made by himself, as was his custom, so intrigued the chef that he asked for his recipe, saying it was "beyond praise".

One day Gilbert had come up from the country to the Garrick Club. After leaving it he passed by the stage entrance of the Adelphi Theatre. He noticed that the theatre was closing, and a tremendous crowd stood around the entrance. He was not long in learning of the

dreadful tragedy that had befallen his friend, William Terriss. He forced his way through the throng to the door. "Stand aside," called out a policeman. "I'm going in," he replied, showing his card. The policeman allowed him to enter, and he found poor Terriss lying on a floor in one of the rooms. Deeply grieved, Gilbert went home, and after a sleepless night, his servant brought him a telegram from the Terriss family, asking him to take a cast of the head. His servant was told to get a cab, and order Joe, his man, to be ready with the plaster, and they went together to the crypt of St. Martin's Church, where the body of his friend had been taken to await the inquest. Here the death-mask was taken of the handsome face that seemed perennially youthful. Terriss always took youthful parts, and looked boyish to the last. Theatre-goers of the 'eighties will recall him as the hero in "Harbour Lights". He was a victim of a madman's animosity. The man had applied for some charity connected with the theatrical world, and thought it had been withheld through Terriss's intervention; he, therefore, waited for him in the street, and stabbed him as he was going to the theatre. Thus Terriss was martyred for an imaginary grievance.

A valuable death-mask was once presented to the maker of them, in a curious way. A dinner was given at the Royal Institute, and after the ladies had retired, Sir James Dewar approached Gilbert and, putting his finger to his lips, mysteriously led him aside. He then showed him a death-mask of Sir Isaac Newton, and said, "I noticed the extraordinary likeness of this head to your mother, and I see it is also the exact image of you!" He thereupon gave it to him. Sometime later Gilbert was dining with the Earl of Portsmouth, and in the course of conversation the latter said he was proud to say that Sir Isaac Newton was his progenitor. He knew that there was a death-mask existing of Sir Isaac, but he had tried without success to trace its owner. His guest did not divulge that he possessed it, but shortly afterwards paid an afternoon call on the Earl and gave him the portrait, which he had placed in a velvet-lined box. The recipient of the gift was delighted, and used to show it to his friends as one of his greatest treasures.

To return to the artist's work. He had been engaged for some time on the "Fawcett Memorial", erected to the memory of the blind Postmaster-General, who was a schoolfellow and friend of his father. It was unveiled in the baptistry of Westminster on January 29, 1887. The ceremony of unveiling was preceded by a large meeting in the Jerusalem Chamber, at which Dean Bradley presided. Forty-two years ago, in the great Jubilee Year, this ceremony took place, and I might write "late" before most of the names of the numerous intellectuals who formed that assembly. Nearly all have passed on, leaving the maker of the memorial (who was many years their junior) one of the few exceptions.

Some of those present were the Duke and Duchess of Westminster, Earl and Countess Granville, Earl Spencer, Lord John Manners, M.P., Lord Stalbridge, Sir Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth, Mr. Mundella, M.P., Mr. Shaw Lefevre, M.P., Mr. Raikes, M.P. (Postmaster-General), Mr. Leonard Courtney, Mr. W. S. Caine, Mr. J. W. Anderson and Mrs. Garrett Anderson, M.D., Professor Dicey, Mr. Richardson-Gardner, M.P., Sir Guyer Hunter, M.P., Sir Lewis Pelly, M.P., Mr. James Howard, Mr. M. Young, and Mr. W. Shaen. Mr. Fawcett's father was still alive but, at the age of ninety-four, unable to attend.

Dean Bradley in his speech paid a tribute to the nobility of character Henry Fawcett possessed, and Lord Granville said that the loss of his sight only increased his usefulness and serenity of spirit; he gained in courage, patience, and habit of concentration. Alluding to the accident that deprived him of his sight, he quoted the sad words of the innocent cause of the accident—his wife. "If only he would complain, I should be better able to bear it!" He attracted devotion from all. The Memorial was placed amongst the meditative and sacred poets and divines, close to the memorials of Wordsworth, Keble, George Herbert, F. D. Cowper, Maurice, and Kingsley. It is a medallion portrait in an arch, having beneath it allegorical figures in bronze, representing Motherhood, Zeal, Justice, Fortitude, Sympathy, Industry and Brotherhood. These represent the virtues of the man, and institute what is known as "the little garden of sculpture".

No photograph can do justice to this intricate and very beautiful conception of the artist's mind. Highly finished and rich in ornamentation and colour, it is distinguished by a certain simplicity and breadth of treatment. A touch of blue is skilfully introduced in the background of beaten bronze, studded with turquoise.

When it was unveiled the spectators were unanimous in their marked appreciation, and fully in agreement with Dean Bradley when he said that he had no fear that this work of art would be challenged either by the present generation or by any future generation.

Some years later Gilbert was at the Abbey and went to look at his work. A card with the inscription to Henry Fawcett hung on the wall, and someone had written some insulting words about the artist's work. Underneath, in Italian, was written: "This is how a great artist is treated in England", and in the same handwriting were other lines in praise of the work. It is curious that all Gilbert's works have roused distinct antagonism and malice in certain warped mentalities. When I asked him the reason, he said some objected because his work was entirely new, for they clung to the old worn-out themes and classical renderings, and preferred them. They feared a change of ideas coming into art. Others were those who dreaded competition. They wanted to keep all commissions for themselves. They were jealous of his sudden fame and his continued successes.

About this time he gave up the bungalow at Birchington, and the family moved to Gomshall, Surrey. Frank Holl, R.A., built a house at Burrows Cross, subsequently occupied by Sir Arthur Clay, and by William Leader, R.A. Gilbert's house, formerly occupied by Boehm, and then by Frank Holl, was called "Gravel Pits": it proved a haven of rest and delight to his wife and family. They had many friends at Gomshall, amongst them Sir Arthur Clay, the painter, William Leader, R.A., the landscape painter, Dr. Capern the naturalist, and Mr. Somerset Beaumont, who commissioned "The Kiss of Victory", which enabled Gilbert to go to Rome.

"Gravel Pits" was a Tudor house, with a splendid old garden, and Gilbert's taste and fancy enhanced the possibilities of both choice



possessions. Environment plays an important part in the artist's life, and he says: "In the quiet and peace I did some of my best work there. The Surrey lanes and woods are beautiful in all seasons. I found things that were invaluable to me at Gomshall. The celebrated naturalist, Dr. Capern, who had a remarkable collection of butterflies, beetles and moths, developed my love for natural forms, and increased my desire to make use of them in ornamental designs. The wonderful things that Dr. Capern showed me fully endorsed my views of their importance in my work. In my subsequent efforts in the way of design I more than ever made use of natural forms, not alone of butterflies, beetles, and moths, but the treasures of the sea; fishes of all kinds and every class of molluscous and crustacean life, the crab, the lobster, and such like. To these beautiful objects I am indebted for many of my best incidents of artistic design and construction."

Life at Gomshall was full of pleasure for his children. They each had a pony to ride, and his youngest drove a four-in-hand goat carriage. These animals, beautifully groomed, with brown and silver harness, were the admiration of the villagers. But the goats increased in numbers so rapidly that one day, when counted, they were found to muster too many. Then a man set off with a drove of them to Guildford, where they were sold, and the children had the goat-money for their use. Their favourite companions were Leader's children, with whom they organised picnics, nutting-parties, and many diversions, including acting, of which they were all very fond. Their father was often requisitioned to see them do an "ack", as they persisted in calling it, when his ready gift for devising dresses and stage-managing were of undoubted service.

The Queen's statue at Winchester was commissioned in the first Jubilee Year, 1887, by a wealthy man named Whitaker. He had retired to Winchester after making a fortune in Malaga; but he did not prove acceptable to the conservative people surrounding the precincts. He was, in fact, very unpopular, and this was rather detrimental to the reception of the statue. It was hard that the animosity to the donor should be extended to the sculptor's work; but so it was,



and the exquisite little model of Victory which Her Majesty held in her hand was torn from it on the first night it was unveiled, and thrown away, though afterwards found and replaced. This was merely a repetition of what happened to the Piccadilly Circus Fountain, when the eight drinking-cups were removed. The sculptor found that the workmen entertained a grievance because the casting had been done in Brussels, and the name of the firm had been engraved on the work. To remedy this he had a plate made, which covered the offending name.

The magnificent portrait of the Queen was built up without the aid of the living model, entirely from a photograph; for Gilbert had never seen Queen Victoria until after the statue was finished. He worked by deduction, realised the type, and with his knowledge of anatomy produced a living, breathing being, invested with all her true characteristics, the embodiment of the great Empress Queen. He says: "I realised my deduction of the Queen from my mother. One was Queen of my country—the other the Queen of my heart. I satisfied her family by realising the same attributes of character and motherhood I found in my mother, and thus got a more spiritual representation than if I had merely reproduced the Queen's features and form only." The statue was first erected opposite the Town Hall. It was then taken to the Abbey grounds. Finally it was placed in "The Room of the Round Table", an ancient building assigned by tradition as the meeting-place of Arthur's Knights. The sketch-model of this work was exhibited at the R.A. in 1888.

Gilbert had long wanted to find in London a house with a studio large enough for all his purposes, and he conceived the idea of building one to meet all requirements. He, therefore, bought a plot of land which had already a small house on it called "The Woodlands", and presented it to his parents to live in. His idea of building was negatived from its inception by his practical father, who knew from experience that it would end in being a costly and difficult undertaking. His judgment afterwards proved right; but at the time building seemed the best thing to do. Gilbert had to leave the details to others, and by the use of the most expensive materials possible, such

as Portland tiles for the roof, the house ultimately cost a very large sum. He was earning a good income at the time, and really required a suitable house in town, where he could return the hospitality shown him; but he soon realised his inability to keep a strict hold on monetary affairs while all his thoughts were centred on producing idealistic work. In any case, he was temperamentally unfitted for business.

Gilbert had been commissioned to make a "centrepiece" for the Officers of the Army to present to Queen Victoria as a Jubilee gift. Colonel Hutton represented the Committee and General Fielding was on the Committee. It was two years in process of making, during which Gilbert was worried by the members of the Committee to finish the work. When it was ready he was invited to a mess-dinner at the St. James's Palace, where many distinguished men, all soldiers, were present. He was introduced to Lord Wolseley and Lord Methuen, and found them very cordial.

Gilbert went to Buckingham Palace to unpack the work downstairs. When it was revealed in all its loveliness, the various soldiers who stood near, full of curiosity to see it, gazed at it silently. But one man, a German secretary, by name Mutter, seemed quite taken aback, and cried out shrilly in German, "This is high Art!" They repaired to the State Drawing-room where Queen Victoria sat, and the Field-Marshal and Generals congregated together, with Gilbert modestly hidden in the background. The Duke of Cambridge, in his characteristic way, stepped forward to present the gift to the Queen, and began to make excuses. He said it ought to have been finished long before, but the sculptor, Mr. Gilbert, had kept them waiting for it. He apologised for the delay, which was really inexcusable—but the sculptor. . . . The Queen smiled and said, "Perhaps Mr. Gilbert will explain himself". Thereupon the Duke of Cambridge retired, with that well-known genial smile of his, and Sir Evelyn Wood gave Gilbert a friendly push, and said, "Now then, Gilbert, go forward". Queen Victoria was extremely charming, and expressed her delight at the work. She said: "It is very beautiful, and I like 'Peace going over the World where the Sun never sets,' " and then thanked Gilbert for the work.

Whilst making the ebony base, Gilbert wrote inside an inscription thanking all those who helped him to make it, and invoking misfortune on the one who ever took it to pieces or meddled with it.

The Duke of Cambridge, in his bluff soldier's way, sent Gilbert a message while the centrepiece was in the making: "Tell Gilbert to buck up with that thing". To which Gilbert replied with his respectful compliments, and begged to remind the Duke that he was not a soldier!

Subsequently at Sandringham he met the Duke, who, being one of the kindest of men, came up and putting his hand on Gilbert's arm said, "About that little incident at the Presentation, I think I must be forgiven, I meant no harm". "I am the last man to attribute any such thing to Your Royal Highness," was the reply. Upon which the Duke warmly shook hands with him.



*Photo. Hollier*

WORKING MODEL FOR THE ST. GEORGE PANEL ON THE DUKE OF CLARENCE MEMORIAL.

This panel, in its final form, is clearly seen in the frontispiece. *Chapter X*





## CHAPTER X

### THE CLARENCE MEMORIAL



**W**HILST the house was being built Gilbert was living in chambers in Great Portland Street, and working at a studio in Osnaburg Street, lent by Mr. Thomas Brock. Here the sad news of the Duke of Clarence's death reached him.

If Gilbert had never produced any work but the sublime Clarence Memorial that alone would have placed him amongst the great artists of all time. It took four years to execute, but it really is a lifetime's work. He tells the story in his own way.

"Immediately after I heard of the death of the Duke of Clarence in 1892, I received a telegram requesting me to go to Sandringham. I arrived there quite uncertain as to the nature of my mission. Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales had sent for me to design and execute a memorial to their lamented son. I was chosen because I was the pupil of the late Sir Edgar Boehm, who had been Sculptor-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria, a title that had been revived after long abeyance, as a special honour to him. It appeared that during his lifetime he had spoken very kindly of his pupil. That was doubtless the reason of my being sent for.

"I was at Sandringham from Saturday to Monday. During Sunday night, until just in time to catch my train on Monday, I conceived and designed the ensemble of the entire monument as it now stands.

"Directly I arrived at my chambers I gave orders to my servant that I was not to be disturbed on any account for four days. He was to place my meals on a tray outside the door, and come and go silently. I then entered my studio, and locked myself in before beginning to work."

This task was the most stupendous that Gilbert ever accomplished; the design comprised a large number of figures full of symbolism,

history, and extraordinary imagination. It was not to be wondered at that sleep practically deserted him during such a mental and physical strain. When he unlocked the door at the appointed time an exquisite model was ready. The Prince of Wales came that day to see it, and was abundantly satisfied. He told the artist he considered his achievement was nothing short of a miracle.

Such is the force of Gilbert's purpose, when he so wills it, that I believe he could accomplish a similar feat to-day at the age of seventy-four. His fertility of imagination and facility of execution are only ripened and enlarged through continual study and experience. He continues: "Since the Monument was to go in the Wolsey Chapel my first desire was to visit the spot, and study the aspect in which the work would be seen. The only site in the Chapel was the exact centre, as there already existed a cenotaph to the memory of Prince Albert, and the other memorial tomb to the Duke of Albany. My recollection of the Chapel had not played me false, and the character of the design I had made was a fair basis to work on, in harmony with its environment. The Chapel is Gothic, its history connected with Edward the Third, and William of Wykeham. The interior is, for the most part, a restoration, and the mural decorations, which are of a most costly character, inlaid with precious stones and marbles, are not at all Gothic either in feeling or intention, stained-glass windows being the only part in harmony with the original edifice. Here was a great difficulty, that of placing a modern work that should be in harmony with the ancient work, and yet not a mere reproduction of its parts, but rather the outcome of its suggestion, and what I took ancient Gothic to be to those who practised it, the best example a living artist could compass.

"I determined to treat the whole work in such a way that its general appearance should be that of Gothic, yet devoid of the slightest evidence of imitation. This decision enabled me to indulge in greater freedom as to the design of the ornamental treatment of those parts where costume had to be dealt with, and also as to the form of the sarcophagus which was to contain the remains of the Duke of Clarence. It will thus be understood why the whole monu-





*Photo, Hollier*

THE VIRGIN.

Bronze figure, 1892. On the Duke of Clarence Memorial in the Albert Chapel, St. George's, Windsor. By gracious permission of His Majesty the King.

ment takes the form of an altar tomb—a form of shrine, in fact, the sarcophagus being a sacred receptacle, protected by an open-work grille or screen, as is often seen in ancient works, especially Gothic.

“At the time I had no idea that upon this very spot there had existed, down to the days of the Civil Wars, and after, the remains of the great monument which Torrigiano had made for Cardinal Wolsey at his own command. On the completion of his famous monument to Henry the Seventh in Westminster Abbey the great artist was called upon to execute this work in the Cardinal’s own lifetime, and while in the plenitude of his greatness. The work was for a considerable time in hand, and Wolsey fell into disgrace and died before it was finished. On learning this piece of history I made inquiries, and found records of what the work would probably have been when finished, and to my astonishment and great pleasure I found that I had hit upon the treatment which Torrigiano had found most fitting. I confess that the work of the great master, as shown in his offering to the memory of Henry the Seventh, inspired me with views that led to my making my own design. Its relation to the Abbey is entirely that which I conceived my own work should bear to the Memorial Chapel. I had long before seen and studied the Abbey Memorial, and noted that there was a work with Gothic surroundings which was entirely in harmony, though the work of a then living man and a most illustrious child of the Renaissance.

“I decided to treat my offering as a shrine, as a Gothic sculptor would have done, rather than a portrait effigy. In the conception of the pierced work grille I had in mind the traditional tree of Jesse—an heraldic allusion to the ancestry and patron saints of the Prince and his House.

“Thus there came to grow into form representatives of the patron saints of various countries to whose rulers our own Royal House is akin, and of certain other saints who are acknowledged patrons of the late Duke’s pursuits and his being in life: St. Nicholas for Russia, the patron saint of boys and sailors; St. Edward the Confessor, namesaint of the builder of the Chapel and of Edward the Third; St. Barbara, patroness of armourers and fortifications; St. Etheldreda,



or Audrey, the old English Saint for Cambridge and the Eastern Counties. St. George and the Virgin were suggested to my mind for a twofold purpose. It appears in the history of the Chapel that when Edward the Third called upon William of Wykeham to aid him in its building, he desired that this part should be dedicated to St. George, the King having just founded the 'Order of the Garter'—and there is some sort of supposition that this restoration of an existing edifice was meant as a lady-chapel. William of Wykeham, not a little sore at the King's desire to be considered the master builder, took umbrage, and refused further work unless his own share should be recognised. And he is supposed to have stipulated that the Chapel should be dedicated to St. George with the Virgin as a tutelary saint.

"In regard to the symbol of the Blessed Virgin my desire was to suggest the maternal devotion which to my mind could not be otherwise illustrated.

"Now we come to the sarcophagus. The recumbent figure was a representation of the dead Prince, and had to be a realistic one in order that in future ages his lineaments and clothing should be truthful history. This was a great difficulty. The representation had to be placed at such a height from the eye that its modern details should not present a jarring note in the whole conception. Another reason for the height of the recumbent figure was the expressed desire of his mother that the remains of the dead Prince should rest in mid-air. The kneeling angel at his head, supporting the elaborately wrought crown as a canopy over the figure, is symbolic of the promise of Eternal Life, the crown representing the twelve-gated City spoken of in the book of Revelation. At the feet is the representation of Love, an Anteros rather than an Eros, the sad Love holding in its hands a broken wreath, its head bowed and draped, its wings enveloping the feet of the Prince.

"Many inquiries have been made as to the introduction, and also the meaning intended by the treatment of the figure of the Virgin. It is the outcome of reflection upon the nature and character of the Divine Personage. I have shown her standing in the middle of a wild

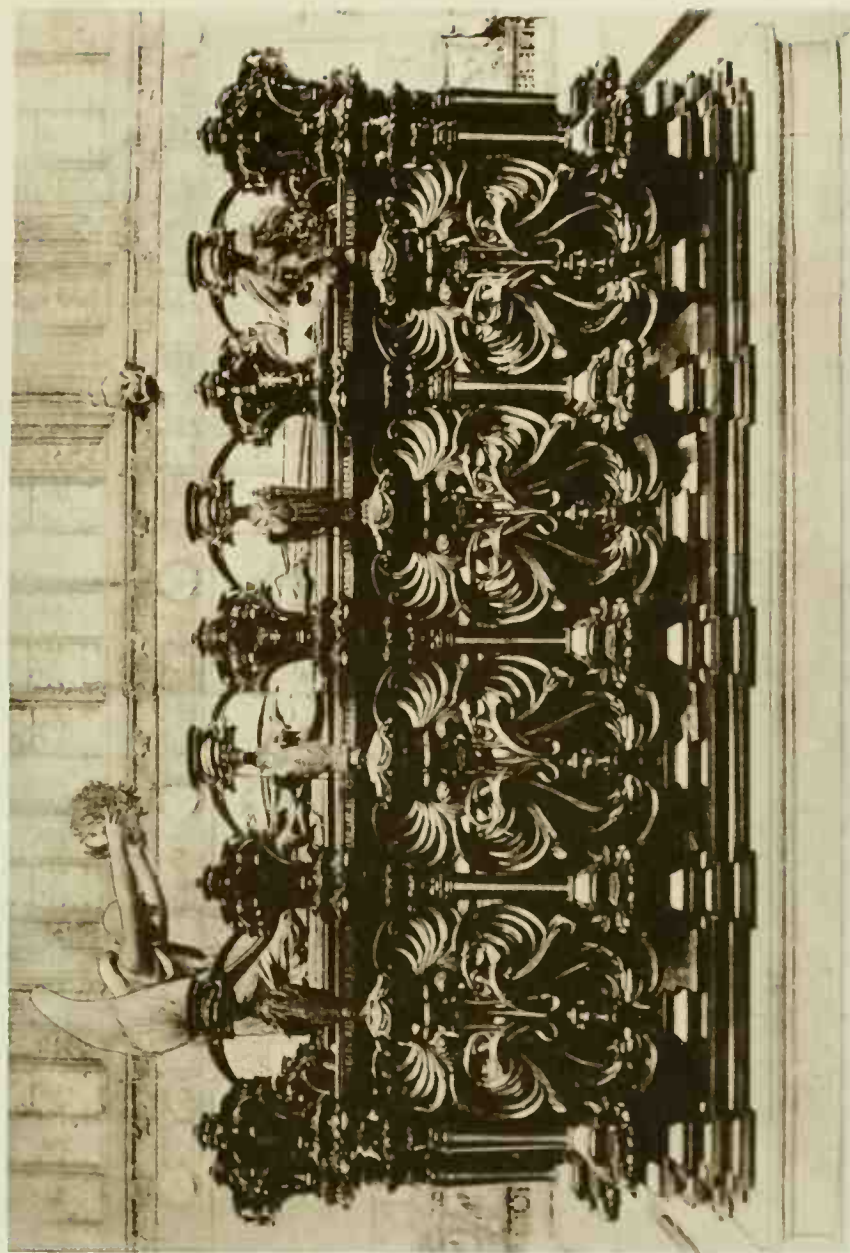
rosebush. Circling her feet it forms a natural crown of thorns which, sprouting, send their shoots upwards and around the figure, in their turn giving off roses to within reach of her clasped hands, when a white lily rises to her touch. Thence the fronds ascend, and twine round her head and form a natural crown of full-blown roses. The Virgin is simply draped, with a head-covering overshadowing her half-sad expression of features: and she is meant to be in the attitude of resignation rather than that of prayer. The same base that supports St. George carries this figure, as it does all the others."

Mr. Joseph Hatton's comments on the beauty of these statuettes may here be quoted: "The statuettes as component parts of the rest of the monument", he said, "are not only remarkable for their design and beauty of detail and ornamentation, but for the lustrous glory of the colours that distinguish their costumes. The shifting light of the sun, or the flickering of memorial candles on them refreshes the eye with the iridescence of pearls, precious stones and crystals, and what appears to be a gorgeous pigment, all toned in accordance with their relative values, and in artistic combination-effects which, by the way, may be found in Mr. Gilbert's altar screen at St. Albans, and in many of his smaller works in metals. I asked him if he would give me some information about these arrangements of colour, in which the art of the painter had been annexed by the sculptor. Mr. Gilbert said: 'The colouring of these figures is not paint, neither is it enamel. It is produced by a medium which by many experiments I thought would serve me well, as it has abundantly proved. As it is composed of oxides and certain liquids, of natural and imperishable lacquers, I have every confidence that it will last for ever. Some of the colours are vitreous, though not in the sense that they have been treated by heat. The sarcophagus itself is made of Mexican onyx, and is actually, in its construction, rather a piece of engineering work than of masonry; and this part of the structure, though invisible, is perhaps the most elaborate and deeply-thought-out portion of the whole work. For all sorts of questions such as weight-bearing, compensation for changes of atmosphere, thrust and stability, to say nothing of the necessity of providing a safe bearing for the enormous

weight of the whole monument over the thinly groined vaulting of the floor of the Chapel, had to be considered. St. George occupied two years of steady work. The armour is absolutely an invention. Every detail is so contrived as to be a working model of a suit of armour that could be worn. The shapes of its parts and the ornamentation of them are merely a résumé of the entire monument—every line being one which can be found in the smallest detail existing in the rest of the work, which has the appearance of Gothic; and yet I maintain that there is not the slightest resemblance to anything we know of Gothic work, unless the use of shells and other natural forms may be said to have influenced me, as they doubtless did the Gothic craftsman of mediaeval times. The sword, even, which represents a double-handed one, is a pure invention, and is rather meant as the symbol of such a weapon than an archaeological fact. The pedestal is a free use of the conventional form denoting a reptile, arranged geometrically so as to form a base for the figure of the Dragon and All Evil, which the Saint had overcome.’”

It will be abundantly seen how Gilbert has allowed his sublime gift of fancy and idealism to have full play over this most wonderful monument, and he roves in turn from allegory and symbols to legends, romance, or the story of a miracle to enrich his design, which he weaves in imperishable metals.

“The introduction of St. Elizabeth of Hungary”, he says, “was made because Queen Victoria, when the names of the proposed Saints were submitted to her, expressed a desire that St. Elizabeth, who was the progenitor of the late Prince Consort, should be represented. This suggestion of Her Majesty’s was a particularly happy one. It gave me scope to carry on my train of thought with regard to the Virgin, and other female Saints, to represent St. Elizabeth as the all-charitable and loving embodiment of the best human nature. According to the legend, she was the wife of the Landgrave of Thuringia. She was credited with profusion of almsgiving to the poor, despite the sordid proclivities of the Landgrave, to such an extent that he refused to find her any more means for the exercise of her charities. She therefore sacrificed jewels and other possessions.



*Photo. Hollyer*

THE DUKE OF CLARENCE MEMORIAL, ALBERT CHAPEL, ST. GEORGES, WINDSOR  
FROM THE SOUTH.

By gracious permission of His Majesty the King





One day, when she thought the Landgrave had gone hunting, Elizabeth, filling the skirts of her gown with bread and fruits and other things, went forth on her mission of mercy. She was met unexpectedly by her spouse, who, seeing her so heavily laden, inquired what she carried. 'Only roses,' she replied, and extending her arms there fell from her garments in rich abundance a mass of roses, red and white; and this miracle converted the Landgrave to the faith of St. Elizabeth.

"I have chosen to represent this Saint richly clad and crowned as becoming her rank, and in contrast to the errand that earned her glorification, that she might present a distinct embodiment of the Virgin, who, though of lowly estate, was the greater. The dress is so composed that the ample sleeves form pockets, and falling from these are flowers which create a crown of roses about her feet, whilst she herself wears an earthly crown of responsibility and great weight. The Virgin has the thorns at her feet, Elizabeth the rose; she is a mortal bearing the emblem of the greatest earthly power on her head.

"It may be observed that all the female faces bear a family likeness. They are meant to represent individual members of the same family. The study for the heads was made from the same living being, and with the same ideal prompting. Edward the Confessor, through the type I have chosen, is an embodiment of an indulgence which I permitted myself as a personal recompense for my labour by portraying a suggestion of a contemporary existence of the greatest poet-painter of our era. The head is actually a portrait, and I have not thought it an impertinence to dress my hero as a King in his art, and a Confessor in his modesty of purpose."

Mr. Walter Gilbert, the maker of the Buckingham Palace gates, in describing the impression he received when he saw the grille surrounding the Tomb, said: "The grille is really the most wonderful conception, for it is the story of the passage of the soul battling with the wild storms and tempests of life; during that passage the soul is cheered by the promise and signs of hope—the silver figures sparkling in their purity and radiance of the saints, who by their faith, their life, and their achievements give hope to mankind. These in their

lantern-like settings are guiding lights to the mariner on his tempestuous voyage.

"But my eyes went from the tempestuous sea, the grille, to the left hand of the Prince clutching the handkerchief, the pathetic symbol of the intensity of the struggle which every mortal has to face. I felt my emotion stirred to breaking-point. Yet the Crown of many mansions held up over the Prince's head—the promise of peace after toil, port after stormy seas, gave me the casing comfort of Eternal Promise.

"No artist has ever made so dramatic an appeal to man's innermost feelings. When this is realised, as realised it will be in the days to come, Alfred Gilbert will be reckoned as the most poetic sculptor the world has ever had—the greatest, because he can play with the fullest throb, those feelings which are Divine in us.

"The builder of the Taj tells us in the most impressive manner what companionship meant to a man's soul passing this life, and the unbearable grief of separation. Nur Jehan's sad tomb across the Ravi shows the briefness of a life's achievements, but there is no one who gives us the poetry and beauty of life in all the lights and shades, and especially in the love which brightens and glorifies man's existence, with the intense and throbbing music of the Psalmist, as does Alfred Gilbert."

An eminent writer, speaking of Leonardo da Vinci makes him say, "I will think in gold, dream in silver, imagine in marble, and in bronze conceive". How amply these words apply to the maker of the Clarence Tomb, a work of art that completely eclipses the notable piece by Cellini in Florence.

If we compare recent war memorials with this grand poem in sculptural form, it leads only to sadness of reflection, and astonishment that the greatest living artist should not have been asked to execute them, instead of those with limited vision and penury of thought and invention.

In the ages to come what will be thought of those emblems of incapacity and negation? The question will arise—"And yet there was the maker of the Clarence Tomb, in full possession of his powers.

Why was not he requisitioned once again to memorialise a Nation's grief, not for an individual this time, but for a world-wide woe, when mothers knew 'the sword that pierced through Mary's heart'—and strong fathers trembled and wept in anguish over the loss of those young lives radiant in youth and promise who went forth so eagerly, so gladly, to do their duty, and die for their country?"

Prince Henry of Battenberg used often to seek Gilbert when he was engaged at work on the Duke of Clarence's Tomb. "If I may come to sit with you I will be quite quiet," he used to say. Then as he smoked he would talk, ranging from one subject to another, in his charming way. Amongst Gilbert's most cherished possessions is the picture Prince Henry gave him as a souvenir. He was an extremely handsome man, high-spirited, with a sunshiny nature, and his untimely death in the full vigour of manhood was deeply deplored.

Gilbert was commissioned by Queen Victoria to erect a Memorial at Whippingham to Prince Henry. He arrived at Osborne on a Saturday, and an order came that evening from the Queen to dine at Osborne on Monday evening. Here was a dilemma; he had only brought a dress suit, and a Court dress was required. As it happened he had taken his moulder to Osborne, not to do work, but to give him a change of air, and a holiday. The moulder had been a tailor in his youth, and he now spoke.

"Why, it's easily done, sir—cut the trousers into knee breeches!"

Gilbert, amused at the originality of the idea, said, "That's all very well, but I have neither shoes, stockings, nor Court buckles!"

"Oh, I can manage all that," replied the man confidently, "you leave it to me."

He proved equal to the emergency. On Sunday morning he rang the door-bells of various shoemakers till he found shoes and buckles that would pass muster. He solved the problem of silk stockings by obtaining a pair fashioned for feminine use. His sartorial art, long neglected, now came to his aid, and with pride he snipped the trousers into knee-breeches, whilst his master looked on with great misgivings. He was burning his boats on the moulder's professed knowledge of his craft.

Meanwhile Gilbert's remark that he had only a dress suit with him was reported to Her Majesty, who with her usual graciousness sent him word that he was not to worry about Court dress, his evening dress would do. Alas, he had parted with his suit, and now anxiously awaited its transformation. But his fears were groundless, the man acquitted himself well, and on Monday evening behold the artist equipped for Court.

Queen Victoria was sitting in a chair, such a diminutive little old lady that when she stood he was looking down upon her and could count every bugle on the top of her cap—and he is not tall. He says he never thought to see so much majesty and dignity in any human being smaller than himself; but the Queen was the embodiment of it. She greeted him very sweetly, and he made his bow, being very careful how he moved backwards, conscious all the time of his makeshift attire. He felt like the man who "had not a wedding garment". But his fears were allayed by the Queen's demeanour; only, as he stepped backwards as delicately as King Agag, she smiled, and smiled. Someone had told her the secret of his wardrobe, and she had replied, "How clever".

While doing the bronze work for the Memorial Tomb, Gilbert erected a temporary workshop adjoining the lych-gate of Whippingham Church. The Vicar, the Rev. Clementi Smith, often came to see the work, which was carried on at night in cold weather. Villagers used to peer with curiosity at the unusual sight of seven men brazing the metal on a forge. In the play of light and deep shadows they looked like veritable gnomes.

Gilbert has had some unique studios to work in. The casting for the Fawcett Memorial in Westminster Abbey was done in the old Robing Room, now called the Baptistry, adjoining the Jerusalem Chamber, and it must have been a weird and picturesque scene, a splendid subject for a modern Rembrandt.

When the tomb at Whippingham was finished, a small tablet of embossed enamel was put on the lych-gate of the church, with a facsimile of Queen Victoria's own handwriting on the inscription. On Sunday morning the master and his workmen were present at the







ELSIE. DAUGHTER OF SIR DYCE DUCKWORTH, BT.  
Marble bust, 1891. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1891. By permission of Sir Edward  
Duckworth, Bart. *Page 88.*

service. They chose their seats at the end of the church, so that, when the Royal party arrived, they could see their Sovereign Lady enter; and through the open door they saw her pause before the tablet and carefully examine it through a lorgnette before passing up the aisle to the Royal pew.

About this time Gilbert paid a memorable visit to Lord and Lady Brook at Warwick Castle, when he accompanied Lady Dorothy Nevill, who was one of his greatest friends. On their arrival they learnt that Lord Brook was giving a hunt ball that night, and whilst dressing for dinner Gilbert suddenly realised that he was without a pair of white kid gloves, not having anticipated a dance. As he was cogitating how to procure them Lord Brook entered and presented him with a pair—and the former was wearing evening dress, out of compliment to his guest, instead of the pink coat. He then said that his father would like to see him in his bedroom, for he was a complete invalid, so they went together to the old Earl of Warwick's apartment, where Lord Brook left Gilbert to have a chat with his father. The Earl of Warwick was a striking example of the old nobility of England, and his guest was impressed by his perfect courtesy and kindness, as he expressed his regret that he could not personally entertain him. "I hope they will take great care of you" were his parting words. His death occurred a few weeks later. On another visit to Warwick Castle Lord Brook presented Gilbert with a pair of snow-white peacocks, which were greatly admired for their unusual beauty, but they proved the noisiest birds in creation, their unmusical notes militating against the pleasure they afforded as ornaments to his garden.

His acquaintance with the Kaiser was of the spasmodic order that characterised that bombastic, erratic, and unreliable busybody. It began effusively and ended like a sky-rocket. Leighton asked Gilbert to go to Berlin to act on a Special Jury for judging the Art of the International Exhibition. He went at his own expense and stayed eight weeks, during which time he, Alma Tadema, and other R.A.'s indulged in sightseeing to their hearts' content, under the most favourable and agreeable auspices.

One day they visited the tomb of the Emperor Frederick William, whom Gilbert had known well as Crown Prince of Germany. He had a respect and regard for the Emperor Frederick, and as he approached the tomb, moved by a sudden impulse, he took the tiny bunch of violets he was wearing in his buttonhole, and gently threw the tiny posy between the railings surrounding the tomb, so that it alighted on the sarcophagus. It was an involuntary act, which he forgot at once, and his surprise can be imagined when he received the next day a long letter from the Kaiser, brimming over with bonhomie and thanks for the beautiful tribute paid to his august father. The recipient of the letter, however, thought it was quite unnecessary to have drawn any attention to the matter. The incident had been reported to the Kaiser by someone who had watched the party. It became noised abroad, and everyone wished to do the same. It became the fashion for everyone to go to the tomb and leave floral offerings, since it had pleased the Kaiser.

But when the visit to Berlin was drawing to a close Gilbert fell out of favour as rapidly as he had gained it. He was called upon to make a speech at a dinner given in honour of the R.A.'s, which was afterwards reported in full in the German papers. The Kaiser sent him another letter, this time sizzling with wrath, and after a violent tirade against the innocent author of it came the command that he must leave Germany within twenty-four hours. Gilbert was only too willing to do so, and with his usual indifference to the censure of others when he knows that it is undeserved, he asked for no explanation, offered no apologies, and departed serenely. As soon as he arrived in London Lord Rothschild invited him to dine with him, to meet the Queen Mother, the Empress Frederick, by special command. He obeyed the summons, and after dinner the Empress Frederick had a private interview with him.

"What was it you said that offended my son when you were in Germany?" she inquired.

Gilbert told her everything, and said that he was quite unconscious of wanting to offend.

She listened attentively, then remarked, "There was no reason

for him to take exception to your speech. There was nothing he could reasonably object to, and as usual he has only made himself ridiculous.”

She later proposed to build a residence for herself outside Berlin, and asked Gilbert to undertake the decorations throughout. He gladly agreed to do them, but she died before the scheme could be carried into effect.

Her flamboyant son had not finished with Gilbert. Some years later, when he was at Cowes for the Regatta, he sent one of his urgent telegrams, directed to the Royal Academy, summoning him to his presence. The message was transmitted to Bruges. Gilbert replied that he regretted he was engaged and unable to come. Thereupon the Kaiser sent another very peremptory message, but no notice was taken.

He was, however, destined to see the Kaiser once again, under very peculiar circumstances. Gilbert's old house in Bruges had a large garden surrounded by a high wall. The Kaiser was in hiding in the next house for some days during the War, and was to be seen at night wearing a long cloak, and a hat pulled down over his eyes, as he paced about in the garden, a mock hero, whilst a world-wide War was waging and men dying by thousands daily to satisfy the caprice of a neurotic madman for plunder and power.

## CHAPTER XI

RODIN, LEIGHTON, AND OTHERS



ILBERT gives the following account of his first meeting with Rodin :

"It must have been somewhere in the 'nineties that one of those periodical waves of quasi-hysterical enthusiasm set in over London at the prospect of a visit from the long idolised Rodin. Such a speedy response to ardent supplication could scarcely be realised though devoutly hoped for. A feast seemed the most fitting thing to begin with. What other ovation for a materialised phantom than a banquet for it to appear at? The eleventh hour was approaching, and I was about to leave my studio, happily, fully apparelled as I deemed fitting for such an occasion, when a hansom drew up before my door and disgorged a brace of individuals, one of whom was my dear friend and early master, Edward Lanteri. I cannot recall his companion, but both men were highly excited.

" 'You are coming? That's right. Jump up quickly. Come along, no time to lose,' gasped Lanteri. And turning to the driver, 'As fast as you can back to whence you brought us.'

"He had addressed me in French, which we always spoke when together, or rather, we indulged in the *Quartier Latin* argot, as a more intimate means of interchange of kindred sympathies.

" 'Mon cher copin,' I said, which in the popular vernacular would read 'dear chum', 'what on earth is the matter, why all this excitement? Has anything happened to Rodin? Have I mistaken the hour? Are we late, what is it, *enfin*?' "

" 'Nothing has happened so far except a disappointment for the Committee: their chosen Chairman is unable at the last minute to preside, or to be present. I took the liberty of suggesting you should be asked to fill his place, and I have come to you with their authority and my own hope that you will not disappoint us, so I pray you to help us in our dilemma.' "





COMEDY AND TRAGEDY.

*Photos. Pickard*

Bronze statuette, 1892. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1892. *Page 88.*



“‘I will do my utmost,’ I replied, ‘but that will be but a sorry affair seeing that the task is a great one, and my unpreparedness alarming.’

“I had never met Rodin, but, of course, I was familiar with his work, and, as luck would have it, I had always refrained from expressing my opinion on the subject. Thus a free hand was assured me in the carrying out of my undertaking.

“On arriving at the place of meeting, we found Rodin surrounded by an admiring crowd, he looking as though he wished himself elsewhere, and they of the throng who had managed to get nearest to him determined to keep their places. In due course we managed to make our way to the great man’s presence, and, after a formal presentation, accompanied by endless bows, eulogies, and panegyrics, in true French style, a tacit feeling seemed acknowledged, both on the part of our guest and myself, that each was the other one’s victim. I know I felt it keenly, and soon learnt there was reciprocity of sensibility, when on offering my arm to our guest on dinner being announced, he said in suppliant tones, ‘*Ayez pitié de moi, n’est-ce pas? Je ne sais pas faire des discours*’—to which I replied, feelingly, ‘*Moi, non plus!*’

“Rodin was simple, modest, and dignified, and presented no likeness to the numerous portraits from either pencil or pen which had reached us. Of medium height, well-knit frame, surmounted by a remarkable head which showed a superior mentality, Rodin’s person was exactly what I should have imagined him to be, all sensational vapouring set aside. As I sat by him I felt that he was a being of individuality, not a compound phantom of Michael Angelo, Leonardo, and other minor spirits.

“He was of extremely nervous temperament, with a great power of self-control, a keen observer of men, and an adroit master of his own powers to mould them to the requirements, the whims, and even vanities of others. He could impersonate Michael Angelo; but professed to be himself. He could be a Master impressionist, as he has shown in his statue of Balzac; but at heart he was that sort of artist which his beautiful work on the frieze around the Bourse in Brussels proclaims him.

"One possessed of so keen a sense of humour would be prone to view men and their foibles much as Marochetti did the craze of his day for the productions of Gibson. Boehm told me that Marochetti once said "that for a public who see anything to admire in the work of Gibson anything was good enough!" Rodin's views were identical as regards momentary public crazes, and not being one given to victimising himself, financially, honoured them to his own contentment and his personal advantage.

"One cannot defend unreservedly such an attitude in an artist of such power; but it is rather the tempters, and not the tempted upon whom fullest contempt must fall; though the tempted, if a great artist, should be prepared to accept some share for his tacit complicity.

"Lanteri, though an intimate friend of Rodin's, confessed to me most reluctantly a complete accord with my estimate of his friend's great worth, and his slight demerits. He depreciated, as I do most emphatically, the power of contemporary current taste over the will and true instincts of any artist worthy of his calling. My one meeting with this great artist was sufficient to strengthen my private estimate of him as such, and to discount all fanciful eulogies of his performances, and weird descriptions of his personality. *'Requiescat in pace.'*"

Rodin had an unqualified admiration for Gilbert's art. A friend, in conversation about the latter, compared his work to Cellini's. Rodin at once interposed—and stretching out his arms, exclaimed enthusiastically: "Only a hundred worlds greater".

Another introduction to a famous artist is thus recorded:

"I first met Burne-Jones at the Grosvenor Gallery about 1886, when I exhibited my statuette 'Offering to Hymen'. I had purposely chosen what may be termed an 'off-day', instead of the 'private view', for I had a horror of such gatherings, in order that I might verify for myself the effect of the favourable notices in the press of my work upon the public, thinking that as I was quite unknown by sight I might carry out my purpose unobserved.

"Fate decreed otherwise. She brought me, a somewhat retiring youth, into contact with a great artist, and one of the most modest



of men, and I formed a sincere friendship which lasted to the day of his death, a friendship of which the memory has cheered me in hours of despondency.

"Whilst watching the throng of visitors in its passage backwards and forwards, I became aware that two men had taken up their stand in front of my work and that the elder was demonstrating to his junior, who I saw was Charles Hallé, the son of the famous pianist. I knew him slightly in his capacity of manager to Sir Coutts Lindsay—and only later did I become acquainted with his merits as an artist. As to his companion, I had no idea that he was the man who had painted 'Love among the Ruins', a picture which fascinated me in my youthful days before going to Paris.

"Whilst speculating as to the estimate they were entertaining of 'An Offering to Hymen', I felt a gentle touch on my shoulder, followed by a friendly grasp of my arm, and a cheery voice said 'Come along, my boy. You must know my friend Burne-Jones.' This was Sir Coutts Lindsay, a man devoted to Art, and a sympathiser with those who embarked in her cult.

"Turning to Burne-Jones, he said, 'You and this boy must know each other, Ted. You are kindred spirits, with methods and expression widely dissimilar. Make allowance for his French training, and if you find its influence excessive, remember it, like all preliminary instruction, is only a means to an end.' This rather grandiloquent speech was followed by a formal introduction, and Burne-Jones gave me a cordial grasp of the hand, and we all four engaged in a long conversation.

"I found that Burne-Jones, so far from objecting to French training, was quite envious of the advantages I had profited by my study at the Beaux Arts. He deplored the fact that he had never enjoyed any initiatory teaching—to which Coutts Lindsay replied, 'Your strength lies in what you call lack of such training. If you had been highly trained, technically, you might not have proved your right to your personal achievements. You are that you are, so be grateful, as we are, who love your Art.'

"Sir Coutts Lindsay owned the Grosvenor Gallery for years;



but lost money over it, and took the New Gallery with Comyns Carr.

"The personality of Edward Burne-Jones completely endorsed my conjecture as to what it might be while viewing, years before, his 'Love among the Ruins', and now, on the occasion of which I am speaking, and while talking to him in his studio, with his later works as a background, I was more than ever impressed by the remarkable fitness of their creation to the individuality of their creator.

"I know of no other example, except that of Michael Angelo, where personality and production are so intimately wedded. Turner's works suggest quite a different physical being as their author, to that which he actually was. No one looking at Rossetti's 'Annunciation' could ever associate it with his personality. The entire atmosphere in which Burne-Jones lived was exactly that which one might suppose it would be. This complete unity and harmony between the man, his home surroundings and his work, was most remarkable.

"My next meeting with Burne-Jones was at his home 'The Grange' West Kensington, where I found a warm welcome and a delightful entertainment awaiting me. I was asked to come early as my host considered the late afternoon light the most suitable for viewing his pictures.

"It was a Sunday, the day upon which he was in the habit of receiving his friends in his studio, and afterwards entertaining those of his choice at supper: an informal and most enjoyable repast, where humour and wit, combined with refined simplicity of good fare, characterised these suppers as the most perfect form of aesthetic delight. The master and his sweet wife were the perfection of hosts, and their adorable daughter, Margaret, with her peculiar charm, together with her brother Philip's genial assistance, went far to make their parents' hospitality an ideal of perfection.

"It was still the fashion to decry the prowess of this great artist, but I was quite as impervious then as I am now to fickle popular opinion. As a fervent admirer of the only work of Burne-Jones I was acquainted with at that time, 'Love among the Ruins', I was prepared to content myself with smaller achievements. Instead, I found

myself in the presence of his greatest work and one of all time, 'King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid'. It roused mingled feelings of wonder and joy, and I felt such a rush of enthusiasm and sympathy with the artist and his aims, as still recurs when I think about his works.

"We passed on to new and other pictures in progress. The 'Briar Rose' series, as yet incomplete, was a revelation of the power of human genius to assert itself as a teaching factor of the potentiality of imagination over material effort. From that moment I became a humble proselyte to the aims of two of the greatest artists of modern times—Turner and Burne-Jones."

Professor Lanteri, who had worked with and known intimately the greatest artists of his century, was inclined to look hopefully towards the future in regard to the art of his period. In reply to a pessimist who said he could see very little that was being produced that could possibly live in the future, the Professor said, "If one great work is produced every year, there will be a hundred great works a hundred years hence!" He then referred to three artists he had known—Dalou, Rodin, and Gilbert. He mentioned them in order of age, and then said, "Gilbert comes first".

Leighton was an ideal President as well as a perfect host. He was in the habit of inviting all the Royal Academicians to dine with him two or three times a year, and it was his custom to have a few at a time to meet other celebrities. Gilbert was a frequent guest, and at one dinner he attended, no less than three Presidents sat at the head of the table. Leighton, who sat in the middle, had Sir James Linton, President of the Royal Institute, on his right, and Whistler, President of the Royal Society of British Artists, on his left. Leighton had the gift of making each guest feel that his presence was indispensable. His knowledge of languages enabled him to converse with men of different nationalities in turn. A son of the Tsar's physician, he was born in Russia and educated in Germany and Italy. The Tuscany School appealed greatly to him, and influenced his Art. Dignified, brilliant, witty, and accomplished, with a knowledge of men and affairs, he would have made an ideal ambassador. Everything that he touched bore the note of perfection, and his sumptuous entertain-

ments were no exception. After dinner he used to take his guests to the Arab Hall, where they smoked, and then to his studio, where they generally stayed till a late hour.

At one of his dinners, being an epicure of a fine order, he produced some choice wine, very old white port. "This, Gentlemen", said Leighton, "is '37 port, almost white—a survival from my father's cellar. It is served as a liqueur, because it is my last bottle but one. I trust it is not 'corked'. You shall taste it, and decide." His butler then filled the tiny glasses, and they all drank. "Now", said the host, "what is your opinion?" Everyone praised it but one man, who held it to the light, as if he were a great connoisseur, and said, "It is corked"—to the amazement of the rest of the company.

"There ensued the fraction of a pause, during which everyone felt hurt at the blunt and tactless verdict pronounced. Then Leighton, fine gentleman that he was, made an eloquent gesture with his arm, and told his immaculate butler to bring the other bottle.

"This worthy, who was always called 'Cockeye' by his master, now approached the tactless guest, with a snowy napkin round the bottle and filled another glass with fresh wine. No one else wanted any more, the "connoisseur" drank the liqueur complacently, seeming unconscious of his *faux pas*. Leighton never invited him again. The wine was corked: they all knew it; but the rest of the guests would have cheerfully died rather than own it to their host."

Giovanni or "Nino" Costa, as his intimates called him, often stayed at Leighton's house in Melbury Road, when he left Italy to visit England. Gilbert says "He resembled a mediaeval Florentine, and has been compared to Savonarola, but he was without the ascetic and hawk-like expression of the great reformer. He had a wonderful head, and a countenance that radiated happiness and was a true index to his genial nature. Of medium height and dignified carriage, full of nervous suppleness of bearing and movement, characteristic of strongly marked intellectual powers. Nervous he was to a degree, yet full of will power, and as tender as any of the greatest women who have figured in history as examples of combined womanhood and worldly prowess. Yet he was a man most virile, a born fighter

when occasion demanded; a great artist, and philanthropic patriot. Leighton, Mason, Poynter, Fred Walker, Corbett, and a legion of others owed much that was best in their art to his magic teaching.

"The late Mr. Sam Wilson of Leeds acquired a number of works by Buxton Knight, the landscape-painter, an artist on the same lines as the landscape-painter Costa. These are most masterly, with handling and vision reminding one of Claude and the perspective of Turner. Amongst the Yorkshire artists, and especially from Leeds, Buxton Knight is regarded as an apostle. But Giovanni Costa was the head of this school, essentially a landscape-painter, an apostle, but not a prophet in his own country. The late Lord Carlisle was a great patron of his art, and his works can be seen in private collections.

"In speaking of 'Schools' the value of such institutions must always remain an open question. Hence Herkomer's school at Bushey must receive praise for the enthusiasm raised in its scholars by the untiring energies of its founder. Yet strict adherence to the methods which made it remarkable faded out before his death, and this is accounted for by the fact that Herkomer, though a man of versatility and genius, was unable to inspire his followers with more than they were born possessed with.

"In the arts and crafts, and in the principles of allied practice, there is something to be said for it in its favour, but a great deal more against. It is questionable whether it is wise to interpolate blacksmithery into the art of painting, or even if it is necessary.

"Two other schools, South Kensington and the Slade, appear to have given too much importance to hand dexterity and little encouragement to individual art-vision. There can be no doubt that the early Academy system at the Royal Academy, when teaching was never relegated to one master, but to a number of teachers in rote, each of whom viewed his art according to his own standpoint, was the best. From that much-abused school there has been given a great number of artists working on personal and individual methods. A school is only of value as a preliminary nursery.

"A popular teacher of his day was Professor Legros, headmaster



of the Slade School. He introduced a peculiar method of drawing from 'the life', in line, which was largely used for a period. He left France in 1870, and was one of the first Frenchmen to make his mark as a teacher in England through new methods. His reason for leaving his native land was the Franco-Prussian War. He escaped from Paris during the time of the Third Revolution. But later on, Dalou and Lanteri came to England through the same cause, having greater powers and better methods of teaching. Legros, like most Frenchmen, preferred his own country, though he was naturalised as an Englishman, and when the internal troubles of France had adjusted themselves, returned to Paris, and was eulogised at a banquet given in his honour. One of his countrymen, however, reproached him for being naturalised in England, and demanded to know what he had gained by making himself an Englishman. Legros wittily replied, 'Waterloo!'"

Gustave Doré was an extraordinary genius, who aspired to be a great painter, when, if he had known his limitations, he ought to have confined himself to designing and illustrating. In appearance he was a stout man, with a leonine head, and hair thrown back. He reminded Gilbert of Balzac, and had the same fantastic fertility of imagination. His art was dramatic and his pictures in colour somewhat theatrical, a quality that endeared him to the general public, who flocked to see them. His art was greatly exploited in the Doré Gallery; but he was dissatisfied, for no such recognition awaited him in France, where his countrymen refused to admit he was a great artist.

"'The Neophyte', however, was a wonderful representation of what he intended to convey. A young novice priest, little more than a boy, having entered a Religious Order, is sitting surrounded by elders of the Order into which he had been received. But the springs of youth and joy have long been dead in his companions, if indeed they had ever felt the thrill of youth. Disillusionment, agony of mind, and regret are clearly portrayed in the 'Neophyte's' attitude. What would he not give to undo the chains he has forged under the mistaken exaltation of spirit through which he has so lately passed?



Too late to turn back, he must aim at becoming like the shrivelled souls around him.

"Sir John Gilbert was a parallel case with Doré. A very first rate illustrator, he was never taken seriously enough as a painter."

Whistler arrived at the apotheosis of his glory, though misunderstood. He lived in seclusion, up flights of stairs, in the dingy and sordid vicinity of Charlotte Street, where he had his old-world studio. Aloof and cynical to most men, he unbent and showed his true nature to those whose friendship he revered. He was impatient with those of small views and ignominious aims. He always welcomed Gilbert eagerly, and many an evening they passed together in perfect accord. His host was an excellent cook, and would make an omelette to perfection in his studio, as he talked with enthusiasm on every topic in turn (for he was an untiring talker), and then they would sup together.

"So much has been written and said about this highly gifted artist and wit," says Gilbert, "that one might suppose there remained nothing more to be said. It would be difficult to add to the acrimonious picture extant. Anyone declining to be 'in the movement', to use a favourite expression of Whistler's, may probably incur as much odium as was flung at him, when he disdained its trend.

"Whistler's sense of humour was so keen that the lack of it in his detractors inspired in him real wit. Small of stature, he was a giant of courage. Daring in his opinions, he was courageous in their defence. His inborn wit, sharpened by his knowledge of men and things, developed through circumstances into an absolute gift for humorous satire. This alone accounts for the animosity towards him of a band of artists who were not even good artisans according to his standard, in that they possessed not his dexterity. Writers there were who, though led by so doughty a chief as Ruskin himself, were all outmatched by their intended victim.

"In using musical terms as titles to his pictures he was not guilty of affectation, but chose them because he felt the affinity existing between music and his own ideals in painting. He once said, 'Why should I be taken to task for my homage to the beautiful by borrowing

expressions indicative of the daintiness I aspire to in my art?' Then, after a pause, as though to unburden himself of another thought, 'The ignorance and intolerance of some folk is amazing; those pedlars of trifles are for ever screeching, like the parrots they are, words they have heard in connection with painting as if they understood their application, and yet they begrudge me the use of terms culled from a similar source. If "tone values", "high" and "low", "keys", "relative tones", "dominant notes"—be used and permitted in the family of Autolycus, why should the higher terms denoting sentiment be ruled out for one of his elected? All true artists should consider themselves as such.'

"For a man so well versed in the Bible such disparaging epithets as those that have been applied to him appear to pass the limits of justice, and mark a lack of chivalry such as he would never have shown. His conversation was always cultured and refined, and as individual as the clothes he wore, and his gestures. 'I am that I am', was a favourite expression of his, and on a certain occasion in his studio, he added, turning his head towards a portrait of a beautiful old lady; 'To her—to her—I owe all that is best'—then passing his hand across his eyes he said, in soft accents, 'My mother'.

"Whistler made the mistake of discounting the opinion of his brethren. When he fell out with the critics he had no one behind him to champion his opinions. He therefore had to fight the battle single-handed, which he did courageously, and only triumphed over his detractors because his work was great enough; where, had he been less great, he might have succumbed to the storms of abuse he seemed to have a special faculty of raising.

"Leader, Murray, Farquharson, Peter Graham, and McWhirter marked an epoch. Searchers after truth, beauty, and excellence, they attained it as painters of landscape. With such men it is useless to sneer at the late Victorian period. In the figure school Macbeth holds a high place—historical painting died out, and historical 'genre' came instead, Orchardson,—with minor luminaries, and Lucas,—making incidents without introducing historical facts: the latter attained many well-deserved successes, choosing his subjects from the Stuart





*Photo. Swaine*

THE JOHN HOWARD STATUE AT BEDFORD.  
Unveiled by the Duke of Bedford, March 29, 1894. A contemporary photograph.

and Cromwell period. Then arose the "School for Social Problems": the Chief Priest being the Hon. John Collier with his vast company of myrmidons. This school was the outcome of the *Graphic* and aimed at popularising every-day mundane life. Fildes was the head and Marcus Stone, Frank Salisbury, and Herkomer proved brilliant exponents. Another movement in art was the 'Sensational Picture', practised by individual artists, who, by accident, had assured the sympathy and popularity of the public: for example, Lady Butler with 'The Roll Call', Frank Bramley with 'Hopeless Dawn', and an innumerable host of followers.

"Stanhope Forbes founded a colony, the Newlyn School, and most certainly this new direction satisfied public taste. St. Ives followed after, and some remarkable artists were produced from both colonies: the two schools may be accredited with the propaganda of open-air direct work."

"These little systems have their day . . . and cease to be." The public are fickle in their taste, and the dealers are too often responsible for the sudden and ephemeral success some artists of minor gifts obtain, which ends as quickly as it begins. The greatest and sincerest tribute is paid to an artist's work when his brother artists acquire it, and place it in their homes. They set the seal on its real worth, and the producer knows it will be handed down to future generations. I remember Mr. Sterling had a painting by George Mason that he greatly prized, and when showing it to me he confirmed what has already been said. Some men are indifferent to the opinions of other artists, and only value public applause, which they work for and gain. Gilbert has always valued the former and discounted the latter. But he may be said to have, however, secured both.

His appointment to the Professorship of Sculpture and Lectureship at the Royal Academy came at a time when, having completed works upon which he had incurred nothing but heavy losses, he found his financial affairs were a cause of great anxiety to him. His house at Maida Vale had cost him far more to build than he ever anticipated, an expensive family, and his boundless generosity in helping others, swelled the tide of adversity that was pressing round him. It required



almost superhuman courage and strength to meet the difficult situation, but Gilbert possessed both to a remarkable degree. As he was leaving his home in Maida Vale to give his first lecture, he encountered at the door the man who had come to take possession of the house and studio where he had had such happiness.

He says: "Turning my back upon that melancholy situation like an actor in a play changing to what is called the comedy relief of tragedy, I found at the Academy a large and cordial audience of students and friends awaiting me. I was deeply touched by their reception. They little dreamt with what varied emotions I addressed them. I had trusted in Providence not only for my ability to speak, but also for the matter of my lecture. The change of scene was from the lowered lights and tragic mask of the bailiff and his mission to the comedy of the lecture-room; the dark curtain and the light haunted me for a moment, but I played my part with an apparent indifference to all around me, and frequently elicited the kindly applause of the audience. My success was sufficient to warrant me in pursuing the same course of extemporaneous lecturing in the future and I believe with advantage to my hearers.

"Under these conditions a Professor is moved by the occasion. He would not dare to sit down to his desk and write things in cold blood that he would say and illustrate on his blackboard under the impulse of the time and the responsive influence of his audience."

A student present at the first of his third series of lectures remembered the effect upon the audience when Gilbert made a pause before he spoke of Onslow Ford's death with deep emotion. It cast a gloom which was difficult to dispel. "It was a pathetic incident, and one to be remembered in the remarkable address of the new Professor."

In speaking of his views on lecturing he says—"I don't believe in a sculptor or painter as a mere specialist, I feel that the student should be trained on the most catholic principles theoretically, yet mechanically on the most rigid ones. I treated my subjects on broad principles, not confining myself solely to sculpture. Since I gave my first lectures as Professor of Sculpture at the Academy I have been

called upon to lecture elsewhere. So much so, indeed, that it became a tax; but I felt the work, while pleasant, was also educating me in the very way I designed to educate my students—by practice and experience which beget confidence.”

Gilbert was once asked by a friend what his subject would be for a lecture he was on the eve of giving at Cambridge? He said he had not formulated one. “I shall think it over as I go down in the train.” Meanwhile the reporters were on the *qui vive* and on the spot at his lecture. On the way to Cambridge, at one of the stations he caught sight of the announcement of W. S. Gilbert’s delightful play *Pygmalion and Galatea*; this title was sufficient to evolve a host of ideas, which he wove into a fascinating theme that day.

*The Times* reported this lecture:

“Mr. Alfred Gilbert lectured on Sculpture in connection with the University Extension at Cambridge yesterday. He spoke extemporaneously to an influential and deeply interested audience for over an hour, fancifully illustrating many of his points with dainty references to the classic story of ‘Pygmalion and Galatea’. He remarked that the art of Sculpture was threefold in its purpose: mechanical, real, and ideal, and through idealism became the highest expression of artistic form. The work of the sculptor was not merely one who hews and breaks, and tries to make a figure. There is, or should be, behind his efforts something of love, veneration, and faith. Pygmalion loved the image his brain had created, and he longed for something more—that his great creation should speak. The supreme object of the sculptor was that his creation should speak without the aid of an exhibition catalogue. The work of the artist should be the work not only of his art but of his heart. He was astonished that the practice of teaching and encouragement of art was so little thought of. He was surprised that the Fine Arts were not included in the curriculum of a University career. Form in sculpture was absolutely identical with form in literature, poetry, and music. The sculptor should be as well equipped as the great mathematician, the great poet, or the great architect. The speaker urged the importance of connecting the practice of sculpture with the practice of general education, for

until we had that he was convinced we could never hope to take that rank as artists which great men amongst the Greeks took in a comparatively short time. That was the outcome not merely of mechanical training and skill, but also the influence of great mental culture. When we looked at their works we had to acknowledge our impotence in the creative faculty. The artist must read and be a thinker, and the more he thinks the better artist he is likely to be.

“In conclusion the lecturer eloquently emphasised his view on the kinship of sculpture with literature, and concluded an impressive and brilliant address amidst long and loud applause.”

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SCULPTOR'S HOUSE



THE history of Gilbert's house, Number 16 Maida Vale, contains interest, pathos, and even tragedy. Yet when the foundation-stone was laid by his elder daughter it is certain that nothing but the most pleasurable anticipations were shared alike by every member of his family, with the exception of his father, who saw rocks ahead. Gilbert, with characteristic confidence in the ability of a friend, entrusted the responsible work of the architect to a young and rising man, because he wished to give him a chance to prove his capacity in his profession; but he was inexperienced, and had never been tested by a big scheme of this character. It was unlike any other in design; it required a thoroughly capable and astute man of business to carry it out successfully. The architect outran the estimate by thousands of pounds, and plunged his employer into needless expense. The site was originally used as a nursery garden, with large green-houses; here the house was erected standing back some distance from the road, with a carriage drive from two entrances, winding in a semicircle to meet at the centre of the frontage, and pass under an arch into a spacious quadrangle. On the left was the dwelling-house; on the right the whole side was devoted to a long studio the height of the house, with a cement floor. Steps led from this studio to an upper one with a wood floor and sliding doors, which, when pushed back, formed a stage for acting and dancing on important festivals. A front door opened on to the quadrangle. This studio was reserved for smaller works, and all the large work was carried out below.

No sooner was the house near completion than the owners of the next house, Number 14, raised an objection to the high wall of the studio, which certainly extended a good way down the garden. They pleaded "Ancient Lights" and claimed heavy compensation. It was

hardly a neighbourly act to wait till the house had been erected, and then establish a claim, but the architect ought to have safeguarded his client from any such possibility. The matter was adjusted by Gilbert, who bought the remainder of his neighbour's lease, and gave Number 14 Maida Vale, to his parents to live in. They soon moved from Number 89 Maida Vale, and established themselves next door to their son.

At this time Gilbert's son, George, was at Aldenham School, with his cousin Harold Gilbert. For two years George was known there as Gilbert junior; later, his brothers Francis and Alfredo were called "Tertius" and "Quartus". Francis was destined for the Service, but the matter had been taken in hand too late, and he just failed to get into the *Britannia*. As there was another way of entry into the Senior Service, *via* the *Worcester*, he was sent to that ship. At the passing-out competitive examination between the *Worcester* and the *Conway* he gained the Royal Naval cadetship, far ahead of all competitors. His first ship was the *Theseus*, and within six months he was landed with the punitive expedition in Benin. He afterwards accompanied the Duke of Connaught to India.

Before Francis's success, George had passed into Christ Church, Oxford. Alfredo, the third son, left Aldenham to become a cadet aboard the *Worcester*, whence he obtained a cadetship in the Royal Navy Reserve. He started his apprenticeship aboard the *Torrens*, then went to the *Harbinger*, and finished his term in another sailing-ship in harbour on the West Coast of America. He was by this time eligible for second mate's certificate, if he could get home. He was determined to lose no time, so he got his discharge from the Captain, and worked his passage home as a steward aboard a liner, as there was no vacancy for a seaman. In due time, with trips on "tramps" to qualify him for each grade, he secured his extra Master's certificate. He then became junior officer in the White Star Line. Presently he passed through a season of dissatisfaction with the conditions of a seafaring life, and had a great longing to become a farmer. He soon carried his wish into effect, and worked on a farm in Canada for a year, where he won the affection of his companions. But the call of



the sea was in his blood, and through the help of his uncle, Mr. George Quirke in New York, Alfredo returned to the White Star Line, and was reinstated without loss of seniority. From this it will be seen that he had the same tenacity of purpose and courage in facing difficulties that distinguished his father. Alfredo Gilbert married Miss Jean Gilchrist, the charming daughter of a Provost in Scotland. This very gallant son met his death in the Great War.

Gilbert has many happy memories of the homecomings of his sons, first, from school, then, when they came ashore to spend their leave, with their companions, and enliven everyone with their high spirits, and hairbreadth adventures on land and sea, to which their parents loved to listen. If, in the excitement of securing such an appreciative audience, the narrator "drew the long bow" too freely, he deserved to be forgiven. Gilbert remembers an instance when the story-teller, having coloured his facts too highly, saw the ineredulity expressed on the faces round him. Turning to his brother, to be supported, he said "Didn't I?" But the latter only shook his head slowly. "I'm a bit of a liar myself," he admitted dryly!

On these occasions the sliding-doors of the upper studio were pushed back, theatricals and dancing became the order of the day, and the time passed swiftly. This was just such an atmosphere of home life as Gilbert loved, with his mother near, and the many relations who always revolved round her. Christmas was a great festival, and he instituted a quaint little ceremony of making "Two Queens". His mother and Aunt Susannah were seated in state on thrones, dressed in the richest attire, and the crowns he placed on their heads were of his own devising. Thus the two sisters, no longer young, became the recipients of special homage all the evening, and Gilbert's lesson of chivalry and devotion was not lost upon his sons, who ever showed them marked consideration and reverence.

This house possesses very human memories. There was the excitement of the elder daughter's presentation at Court by her mother, and later, when she passed as a bride from her home. There were visits from Royalties, famous Victorians, wits, and celebrities, and the walls have resounded to marvellous melodies of many famous singers

and musicians. But above all, it has been the birthplace of the most poetical visions and symbolical ideas ever created by the human brain and afterwards immortalised in plastic form.

The delightful distractions of home life were never allowed to interfere with the real work that was so close to Gilbert's heart. His first essay in his new studio was the Clarence Tomb, and rapid progress was made in the plaster stage as far as the main details were concerned, namely the sarcophagus in wood, the bier with the recumbent effigy to the Royal Duke, and the Angel kneeling with outstretched wings holding the Crown of Glory, with the sorrowing little Love at the foot. Then came the news that Queen Victoria was coming to see it, and preparations were made to receive her. The scene was rehearsed the day before to familiarise the postillions and horses with the route they were to take later. The next day policemen in plain clothes were stationed in all the gardens adjoining the house, as well as in adjacent houses, for Her Majesty's safety had to be ensured, and nothing was left to chance. Flowers were to be seen everywhere, making a gay riot of colour as she drove in semi-state up the carriage-drive, under the arch, and round part of the quadrangle to a verandah which led to the front door of the upper studio. Here an agreeable surprise awaited her. Gilbert had ordered a special silk banner to be made with a map of the world embroidered on it, the British portions of the Empire being marked out in red. This was spread on the ground, and when the Empress Queen alighted from her carriage she stepped right on to her Empire.<sup>1</sup> She was delighted with the pretty compliment paid to her, and she valued the thought that had prompted it. She passed into the studio, and was soon looking at the sculptor's work, which she admired greatly. She then inquired after his mother, and requested her presence, and she pleased the old lady beyond words by praising her collection of old china. Still further was the mother's heart touched by what this Royal lady said so sweetly and graciously of her son and his wonderful art.

That was a memorable visit indeed, and one never forgotten.

<sup>1</sup> The banner was given to his daughter Mary Fahey, who greatly prized it. When she died in 1925 it was seen as a pall on her coffin.



SIR RICHARD OWEN  
BORN 1804 DIED 1892  
CONSERVATOR OF THE MUSEUM  
1836 — 1856

*Photo. Hoilyer*

SIR RICHARD OWEN.

Bronze bust, 1896. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1896. By permission of the Royal College of Surgeons. *Page 161.*



Queen Victoria commented on the beauty of a silver "Victory" which Gilbert had placed on a table, surrounded by a profusion of orchids. He afterwards sent the "Victory" to Queen Victoria as a souvenir of her visit, and the orchids found their way to the Princess of Wales.

The work had received the Royal approval; the sarcophagus of wood was translated into onyx, and the bier, the Angel, and sorrowing little Love were converted into different metals; finally a decorative "grille", with twelve niches for statuettes, surrounded the whole work. Seven of the twelve received each a particular statuette of a patron Saint.

Despite the heavy demands made upon Gilbert's time and strength, he yet contrived to carry to completion many other important works, so, when speaking of the Clarence Tomb taking four years to execute, it should be understood that the sculptor does not confine himself to one work, but keeps a number of them all going forward together. He produced a bronze bust of John Hunter for St. George's Hospital, and another of Sir Richard Owen—one of the most remarkable ever made—for the Royal College of Surgeons; and busts of Sir George Grove, and Mrs. Harry Cust. These were not of the conventional size, but half statues, and entailed double the work.

There was such a variety in art treasures at 16 Maida Vale, that the studio closely resembled an art museum. Visitors would first be attracted by the unique character of angels' wings made from the iridescent shell of the "Venus's ear", as it is commonly known. Who but Gilbert would ever have thought of using such material in sculpture? But this only proves the difference between those who *look* and him who *sees*. The latter realises the infinite possibilities of materials, and in applying them stamps his work with his own individuality.

In the lower studio, on a wall, in a half-subdued daylight to match that of the ultimate site, was the Memorial to Randolph Caldecott. It was the statue of a child, the robe and head-dress of aluminium, the face, hands, and bare feet in patinated flesh colour, in a niche of onyx. A medallion, laurel-wreathed, of "the Children's friend" was held between the child's hands.



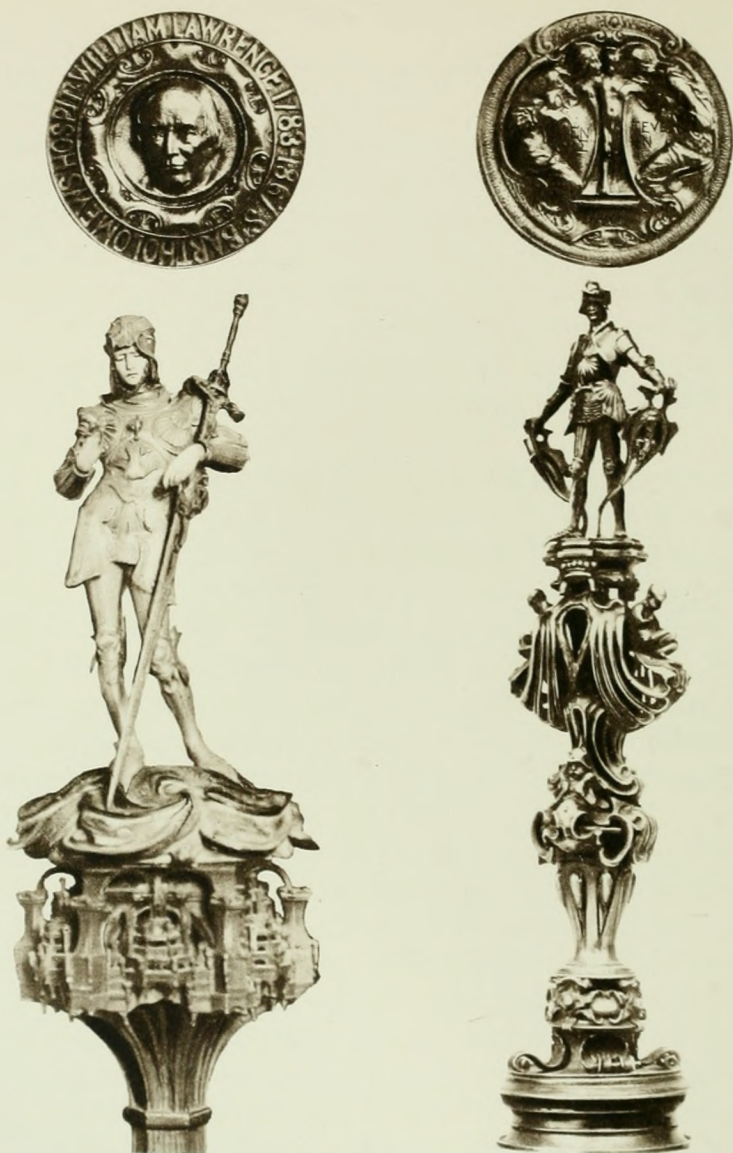
The Baptismal Font for the Marquis of Bath was another example of how onyx and bronze could be made to serve each other successfully by one who understood the values of harmony of effect. I have seen exhibits by well-known men employing the same materials, but the results were garish and deplorable.

A marvellous achievement of graceful design and decorative treatment that stood in this studio was the "Votive Lamp" to the memory of Lord Russell. This work in bronze was erected in the village church at Chenies, Buckinghamshire, by Gilbert's eldest son George, who travelled to Chenies with a fitter. They spent the whole night in the church.

Close to "The Enchanted Chair" was the marble statue of John Bright, intended to be placed in the Lobby of the House of Commons. It was the cause of much discussion and ill-feeling, based upon ignorance of art. The sculptor could produce the work of art, but was unable to endow his client with the brains to understand it. Therefore, it stood in a corner as a monument to the mentality of the one who rejected it, and its ultimate fate is graphically described by Mr. Herbert Hampden, himself a sculptor of merit, who until recently was a tenant of this most interesting house. Mr. Hampden, in writing to *The Times*, says:

"When I entered into possession of these studios in 1902 Alfred Gilbert's rejected statue of John Bright was lying in this garden. I was asked if I would buy it as a block of marble for future use. Needless to say, it was impossible for me to entertain such a proposal; it was the work of a very great artist, one of the greatest England has produced. My regret is that at the time I did not feel justified in purchasing it, and so saving it for a more enlightened generation. Although Mr. Philip Bright says 'objection was most justly taken' to it, he yet says 'it would be interesting to learn the fate of the rejected statue', and that he had endeavoured to do this, 'but without success'. If I remember rightly the statue was sold to a stone-mason; possibly in some shape it now adorns some burial-ground: perhaps the purchaser had some dim idea that the magnificent head was a work of art, and worth saving. Let us hope so."





*Photo. Hollier*

THE SIR WILLIAM LAWRENCE MEMORIAL MEDAL.

In gold, 1897. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1897. By permission of the Medical College of St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON (*left*).

Aluminium and ivory statuette, 1896. On the royal pew in Sandringham Church. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1896. By permission of the Rector of Sandringham.

HANDLE OF SEAL (*right*).

Silver and enamel. By permission of Evelyn, Countess de Vesci

The statue of Lord Reay was a notable success. It was on a grand scale in size and treatment, and in due course it was despatched to its site in Bombay, where it received a most enthusiastic reception. The statue of the Earl of Pembroke was a big upright bronze statue in military uniform, and on delivery from the founders it was put down in front of the house by the carman; it was crated, and what was visible caused much speculation to the passengers on the top of omnibuses. Eventually it was sent to Wilton.

On one occasion Gilbert and his son George travelled to Newcastle-on-Tyne to discuss the details of a proposed statue to Queen Victoria, which a wealthy client who had been knighted desired to present to the town. Returning to London they encountered an alarming experience in the railway carriage, as it suddenly rocked violently, then all the lights went out, leaving them in darkness for the rest of the journey.

During all the big work in the lower studio there was equal activity in the upper one, which was solely used for small and delicate work. Innumerable sketches in wax, ranging from statuettes to spoons and keys, were dotted about on modelling tables. A huge and handsome piece of furniture, a gift from Sir Edgar Boehm, originally intended to keep books under glass, with a writing-desk let in, extended along the whole of one wall, its many shelves covered with little objects in metal, wax, and plaster, which, seen through the glass doors, presented a rich and varied collection of treasures that was unique. Here were the Saints for the Clarence Tomb, and the big rosewater dish and ewer in silver, designed to commemorate the wedding of the Duke of York and Princess May, now our beloved King and Queen. This piece accompanied them on their Australian tour, and on the eve of their departure Gilbert and his son took it to St. James's Palace, for the Prince of Wales's inspection. Afterwards they conveyed it to Southampton, where responsible hands received it.

About this time Gilbert made a bust of Lord Manners's little son, which was cast into plaster and brought back to London. Whilst he was making it he was the guest of Lord Manners at his country



house in the New Forest. He has the happiest memories of his host's courtesy and hospitality.

In recalling the many difficulties that beset the sculptor, Gilbert's son, Mr. George Gilbert, says: "At the time when my father made his 'Eros', aluminium was not as extensively used as nowadays, chiefly on account of the cost of extraction from clay; besides this, great difficulty was experienced in joining together any two pieces of the metal by any other means than by fitting. It is only within later years that a satisfactory flux and solder have been discovered. Apart from its artistic merits 'Eros' was the biggest essay ever produced in aluminium for statuary, or possibly for anything else."

The making of the sketch model of the grille at Whippingham was quickly done. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy, then enlarged with additional details, and a tug was chartered at Southampton to convey it, with the workmen and their tools, across to Cowes; the grille being taken in sections. The party of workmen were lodged at an hotel at Cowes close to the landing-stage, and a conveyance took them daily from Cowes to Whippingham. Queen Victoria was in residence at Osborne House, and in her invalid chair drawn by a donkey used to pay occasional visits to the church to watch the progress of the work, in which she took a deep interest. The site for the Memorial was the Royal Pew behind the choir-seats in the North aisle. Along the front of the pew single circular columns existed as supports to the heavy architecture above. Great care had to be exercised in fitting lest the columns should collapse, as they were rather slender for their burden. Gilbert designed a big two-handed sword of steel, which was placed on the tomb.

Christmas was spent at Cowes, and Queen Victoria, with her unfailing thought for others, sent a hamper containing game and everything delectable to help make it a festival. This kindly trait in Queen Victoria's character endeared her to her subjects, and throughout their work both master and men felt the task to be a labour of love.

The St. Albans reredos was fraught with great difficulties to the sculptor. The materials as usual were of a very costly character, and



the artist, with his many works in course of production, was unable to comply with the insistent demands of Lord Aldenham and his son that it should be finished. Funds did not allow of further expenses. Lord Aldenham was about ninety years old, a wonderfully preserved man for his age, and a very wealthy one; and as a shrewd man of business he should have realised the difficulty sooner. At last he proposed some inadequate plan, hedged round with impossible conditions. Notwithstanding, it was eventually erected, and Gilbert, who was staying at the George Hotel for a few days, worked at the central figure of the Christ. Then he was obliged to postpone his task, as pressing matters required his immediate attention in London.

A costly item for the reredos was the huge crystal sphere held by one of the Angels. Canon Fleming, who was greatly interested in Gilbert's art, brought him a beautiful crystal of unusual size and of great value, and offered it as a gift to the artist for his work. But Gilbert refused it, whilst thanking him very much for his generosity and kindness. Instead, he ordered one to be made which was the most perfect of its kind.

Gilbert very seldom went out anywhere, but occasionally made an exception to this rule when he spent an evening at Alma Tadema's house, where Paderewski was a frequent visitor, whose wonderful music added to the charm of his personality. Miss Anna Tadema was a great friend of Gilbert's elder daughter.

On Saturdays and Sundays guests were welcomed at Gilbert's informal suppers, which combined simplicity with perfection in every detail. The menu was chosen by the master himself. John Swan, R.A., was a frequent guest. Stanley Buckmaster, then a young barrister, sometimes came. Joseph Hatton, editor and writer, generally played a game of billiards before he left. Israel Zangwill, a brilliant writer, author of *The Children of the Ghetto*, had little conversation. The great Whistler often entertained the whole party with his subtle wit; generally at loggerheads with most of his brother-artists, he never had any differences of opinion with Gilbert. He was an extraordinary character, as full of vivacity as a Frenchman.

There were many interesting people of different professions who

used to drop in casually from time to time. They all relied on Gilbert when met by misfortune, adversity, or a sudden tragedy. It has been told how Joseph Hatton came to him directly his wife died, and trusted him to act for him. When Harry Bates, the painter, died in the midst of his promising career, Gilbert went round to lay out the body of his friend. It is a curious trait in the former's character that this act of service has never repelled him in the slightest degree. He performed the same duty to Onslow Ford, and has many a time shaved a dead man's face, whether friend or foe, of high or low estate, and made the one he had known as a breathing sentient being look dignified and composed in his last long sleep.

It must be remembered that when Gilbert became a sculptor a surgeon was lost to the world. Medical men who knew him are agreed on this point, and say that he has a wonderful gift for diagnosis, and he is in his element in dressing and bandaging wounds. For this reason his services might with advantage have been accepted during the War, instead of being rejected because he was just over sixty.

Once a week a well-known fencing master and his assistant used to teach Gilbert's sons the art of fencing with foils and swords. These *assaults d'armes* were held in the lower studio, and greatly enjoyed. Gilbert often took a part, and was one of the most expert in the art of fencing.

One of the oldest institutions in London was the "Amateur Glee and Madrigal Society", which met every month in Gilbert's upper studio, he being elected President. Members all sat round a specially constructed table, with the President at the head; some professional singers from St. Paul's Cathedral helped with the harmonies, and a man at the piano was the accompanist for certain parts. Some of the favourite songs were, "Who is Sylvia?" "Mynheer Van Dunck," Bishop's and Sullivan's works, and "The Long Day Closes". His son George's duties on these occasions were to look after the comfort of the singers, to distribute the music, and to provide refreshments and cigarettes. It was a time-honoured Society conducted in a certain old-world spirit by the host and President, whose attitude of



SIR GEORGE GROVE.

*Photo. Hollyer*

Bronze bust, 1896. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1896.  
By permission of the Royal College of Music. *Page 161.*





mind has always been inclined to be retrospective in certain things, and who values the past more than the future. Above all, he set the seal of his own vivid personality on this chosen gathering of congenial musical spirits.

That wonderfully attractive old Victorian, Lady Dorothy Nevill, was a constant visitor, and often stayed to luncheon. Full of vitality and high spirits, she was a clever raconteur, and most entertaining. When she arrived at 16 Maida Vale, in a pony carriage, her daughter who drove, used to stand at the pony's head whilst her mother alighted, then take a strap from her pocket to fasten the animal up in the courtyard before going into the house. She was a great lover of animals, and never allowed anyone but herself to groom the pony, which returned her affection, and used to lick the hand that ministered to its comfort.

The Marchioness of Granby often came to the studio. She excelled in delicate pencil portraits and published them in a book for private circulation. When her little son died at Haddon Hall, Gilbert was requisitioned to make the death-mask, and from this the Marchioness made a statue with the arms folded, holding a bird. It was considered a wonderful representation, full of poetry and pathos.

At the height of Gilbert's fame and prosperity there was a veritable hive of activity in all the branches of sculpture and art, particularly in goldsmith's and silversmith's work. Experiments in bronze casting and enamelling begun at Fulham were carried much further, then brought to perfection at Maida Vale. Even in plaster and gelatine moulding old Joe Giardelli, his moulder, excellent craftsman as he was, now surpassed himself through his affectionate regard for his master, and out of gratitude for all his kindness and leniency towards his failings. This man was a most curious character, partly Italian, partly English. His life's history had been full of tragedy; first he served in the Army and Navy and went through the Crimean War. Soon after he was mixed up in a carousal of friends, where, all having drunk heavily, a hasty quarrel arose, and a man was stabbed to death. Joe, though innocent of the crime, was accused of it, and received a life sentence. He was sent in a convict ship to Botany Bay,



where his exemplary conduct soon procured his release on parole, and wherever he worked in Australia he was respected and trusted besides being greatly liked. He could neither read nor write, so no news ever reached him from his home, neither did they receive any tidings of him, until, his sentence having been served, he appeared one day in England and was welcomed by his wife and grown-up daughter.

Joe took the greatest pains to make Gilbert's son George a good craftsman, and succeeded well; and in return he taught Joe to read and write in a short time. He was fond of music and had a wonderful store of original songs, which he used to sing at "bean feasts". Poor Joe was unable to shake off an early bad habit; he had lapses, when he would absent himself, drinking for a week at a time, but he was so invaluable a workman, and had such a good heart, that when he returned humbled and crestfallen, promising amendment, he was forgiven, and he always received his wages, when another man would have been dismissed.

Two other workmen were employed, an Italian and a Scotsman; and Collarossi (the model for Eros) was studio boy and Gilbert's valet. This youth did well for himself later. He was nephew to the Collarossi who established the famous School of Art in Paris.

The members of Gilbert's staff all followed him from Fulham to Maida Vale; he employed several metal-fitters and stone-masons, and kept them busy. In the coach-house, at the back, a foundry oven and furnace were built, where only the sand process was carried on by two men, but in the lower studio a special oven was constructed under the master's directions. This was strictly private, reserved for the process of *Cera Perduta* as applied to delicate works. The statuettes for the tomb became fired in this oven. In order to perfect the surface of the metal and overcome blemishes, thereby minimising labour, extensive experiments were made by Gilbert himself with his son as an assistant. No one else was admitted. Many different mixtures compounded of various ingredients were tried, and one improvement led to another. In the cellar, where the boiler for central heating was installed, a special draught furnace was built





ROSEWATER DISH AND EWER.

In silver, 1897. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1897. Presented to His Majesty the King, when Duke of York, by the Officers of the Brigade of Guards. Reproduced by gracious permission.

*Page 163.*

for melting metal. It was quite small and very serviceable for the purpose. Charcoal principally was used for the oven, on account of its superior heat and other qualities. Many a time father and son sat up all night to stoke the fire, to prevent the oven becoming chilled. A potter's wheel was rigged up and its possibilities tried out. Chasing, repoussé work, "riffling", the making and tempering of tools were daily tasks, and, of course, the fitter's shop was of the utmost importance. The craft of fitting requires great experience, but chiefly a delicate sense and appreciation of the beautiful. A motor mechanic would not necessarily become a good fitter for works of art. One of the difficulties with fitters is that they are far too free with the file, and are likely to impair delicate modelling.

There was no end to the ingenious contrivances made or adapted to serve the master's ends. For example: a draw-bench for drawing out wire to a thinner gauge was skilfully adapted to draw out wire in strips of moulding of varied design. A sausage-making machine was one day commandeered from the kitchen, and it was found that by inserting specially cut out discs and feeding the machine with wax instead of meat, surprisingly good results were obtained. It is this mastery over his materials that proclaims the master mind. If he has not got the tool he wants, he makes it.

But what of those so privileged to work in such an inspirational environment, for here surely was an opportunity for the fullest development of the pupil's powers? Gilbert had said, in speaking of Herkomer's school at Bushy, and the fact that his influence only lasted a few years, that the master is unable to give the pupil more than Nature has endowed him with. In other words, the former can teach by precept and example, but he cannot transmit to his pupil his own gifts. In spite of all the advantages given free of cost, his pupils seemed unconscious of their unique opportunities of acquiring all that was not practised elsewhere. They never got beyond draughtsmanship and had no ambitions. Further, they had no desire to break away from accepted teaching to follow out any original idea of their own. And yet a wealth of originality was all around them, and such rare chances for self-development as no other students ever

had. Their master would have been delighted to give them every encouragement, could he have seen the same eager spirit he possessed as a student, a boundless and untiring enthusiasm for work. This is one of the disappointments inseparable from teaching others.

One of his pupils, the son of an R.A., became an illustrator of books. Another pupil was the son of a business man, who undertook the furnishing of the house. His services proved very costly, for he covered some of the walls with expensive silk stretched on frames, and the floors with most luxurious carpets.

But to return to the subject of his outgoing expenses, Gilbert is nothing more nor less than a philanthropist at heart, without the means to indulge his hobby, and he feels a little degree of pride and satisfaction when, on looking back, he reflects that he brought up, educated, and clothed no less than thirteen children, only five of whom belonged to him! They were nieces, nephews, and others who had no possible claim upon him except the fact that they were left unprovided for by destiny. Gilbert, with his large-heartedness, said to his wife, "We cannot do less than give them a home", and she agreed. It was all strangely unpractical and unworldly; but here heredity asserted itself. It was precisely what his forbears had always done, and their descendant was only following the traditions of a family that had given without counting the cost. Think of the little feet to be shod, the little army of mouths to be fed, the cost in education, for no difference was made between his own children and his adopted ones. All received the best advantages, to start them in life, which this philosopher holds everyone has a right to receive.

The question will be asked, "How did his philanthropic venture succeed? Were his adopted wards a credit to his generosity?" They did well from a worldly point of view, but like ungrateful nestlings, they flew away to their own homes, and forgot the foster-parent that fed them.

The question may also be asked—"Was he justified in taking such a responsibility upon himself when he already had more than enough to do in life?" There is too much of the spirit that counts the cost before acting, and then decides that it cannot be done. Gilbert

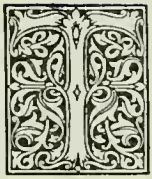


professes no creed, but he practises a magnificent one as he goes through life, an essentially Christian creed that many churchgoers might well emulate. He has no regrets, at any rate, about providing for the fatherless, and is only sorry that circumstances restricted further charities.

I have spoken of the dual side to his character. In regard to his absolute want of business capacity in his own affairs, he can be quite practical in dealing with another's monetary troubles and anxieties, as many a man has proved who has come to him steeped in financial difficulties. The reason is that Gilbert has plenty of judgment lying dormant, but only when moved to compassion can he bring his mind to bear upon such mundane matters. When he does this, he often shows some excellent way out, which, if his advice is followed, enables the man to make good ultimately. Imagination is one of the things that count in business, hence Gilbert has no difficulty in presenting some solution. But in his own affairs he can never succeed in being interested; they appear of no importance compared with the creative ideas that are ever struggling in his brain to be materialised. Charles Dickens noted this trait in his father, and he immortalised it in that strange but delightful character, with more than a touch of the genius in his composition, Wilkins Micawber. And Dickens made David Copperfield reflect on the fact that Micawber's ingenuity and sympathy were often given to others, and his practical assistance was invaluable in such cases—whilst his airy spirit only soared far away from his own affairs.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DEPARTURE FROM LONDON



HOSE who were present at the "Private View" of the Royal Academy, when the sketch-model of the Clarence Tomb was exhibited, noticed a curious phenomenon in connection with it. A dull heavy day produced a film of mist over the plate-glass shade that covered it, so that the treasure was hidden. Suddenly the clouds lifted, the sun shone in full splendour, and the model appeared like a phantom seen through vapour. Great excitement and enthusiasm prevailed, and all the time that it was on view an unending stream of people came to see it.

Sir Frederick Leighton in his banquet-speech referred to this work of art in terms of eulogy; and Gilbert says, "My brother artists' and the public's approval led to my building 'castles in the air' that I might leave something to posterity worthy of my epoch." The sketch-model he afterwards presented to King Edward.

Meantime his expenses were mounting up, and had become a heavy anxiety from which he was never free. Nor, apparently, was there anyone sufficiently alive to the gravity of his financial position, or anyone who could control it. His wife's continual ill-health prevented her from the steady and systematic supervision of every detail in expenditure which large or small households absolutely require. The master of the house spent least upon himself of anyone. His tastes are simple, and he would be content in a cottage in the country, with his art and his books as his only companions. He was obsessed at this time with the great desire to produce a magnificent tomb; with his mind full of idealistic thoughts it was impossible for mundane things to find any place there. One cannot have it both ways.

During the latter part of the time he was working on the Clarence memorial Gilbert was living at Windsor Castle in Edward the III.'s Tower. From the artist's point of view his surroundings were ideal,

but in another sense they proved detrimental to his interests. His creditors thought he had already acquired a fortune and refused to wait till his work was finished, each being determined to be the first to get his demands satisfied. They flocked round him wherever he went, and even came to Windsor Castle to present their petitions.

Gilbert, worried and harassed, requested them to give him time, even three months—but without avail. At last he consulted a solicitor as to the best course to pursue. He was told in suave accents that all his difficulties could be adjusted by “seeking the protection of the Court”. He was assured he would then become immune from his disabilities and troubles. There was something soothing in the phrase, “The Protection of the Court”, and Gilbert (against his better judgment) was prepared for any course that promised to relieve the vexatious situation. He then found what “The Protection of the Court” meant. His house was no longer his home. At any hour he was liable to interruption, for a continual stream of people arrived; inventories were made of all his possessions, his account-books were impounded, all his intimate affairs pried into, so that it came to pass that there was neither peace nor privacy even in his home. How many questions were asked verbally and in writing! What pain and grief of spirit were inflicted on him under that benevolent-sounding institution, “The Protection of the Court!” Protection! It did not exist save in name. “Aggression” would have been a more fitting term to employ.

Gilbert had to appear at many board meetings with coils of red tape to entangle, not extricate, those unfortunate enough to seek the aid of such a tribunal. Notwithstanding, great sympathy was expressed for him, even by his inquisitors, grave-eyed gentlemen, who all the while went on steadily making havoc of this great-hearted artist's life. An upright and bewildered dreamer of beautiful dreams had, of his own free will, brought his affairs to be settled, and all claimants satisfied, “without loss of dignity”, “without disgrace”, and “without any loss in time,” as his legal adviser had said. What about the publicity, the nine days' wonder, and the decision to take away all that he had?

Well might he have said:

"You take my house when you do take the prop  
That does sustain my house; you take my life  
When you do take the means whereby I live."

A friend who knew him at this time told me of a curious visit his creditors paid him when they assembled, at his invitation, in his house. Behold, then, a long line of tradesmen, each carrying his account in his pocket, entering the house that had so recently received Royalties and many of the most famous people in London. The creditors stole in silently, awkward and embarrassed, to discuss their claims and see if any settlement could be arrived at. By some happy chance Gilbert's mercurial spirits had risen, his sanguine temperament had reasserted itself. They beheld the artist smiling and at his ease, and he appeared unconscious of all that hung in the balance. Some of the men he did not even know by sight or name. He passed down the room welcoming each as an honoured guest, as he led them to chairs and chatted with them, having totally forgotten the object of their assembling together. "It was the strangest sight," said this friend, "one full of pathos. The great artist is merely a child in the sordid world of business, a real victim of circumstances with which he ought never to be brought into contact; for art and commerce are like oil and water, they cannot mix.

"As to his creditors, who had every right to be there, I never saw such furtive glances and shamed faces as those men wore in his presence. They seemed to feel that Gilbert was merely the sport of circumstances, and each man in attitude expressed apology for being there, much more presenting his account!"

When all had been given up into the inquisitors' ruthless hands, one who sat in great authority sent for Gilbert privately and said: "I have been through your affairs, and I feel that you have been shamefully used—most shamefully exploited. There was more than enough to cover all your liabilities. You had no occasion to claim Protection of the Court. Now, be advised by me, apply for your discharge at once." As it happened Gilbert had not even the sum

required to pay the necessary fee. He had reduced himself to penury in his cagerness that no one should suffer any loss whatever.

On the last night he spent in his ill-fated house he entertained a few faithful friends to supper, and as they entered he presented each with a number to wear that corresponded with the sale-number pasted upon the chair he was to occupy. In a spirit of irony he hid his real feelings, and his friends assumed a joviality they were far from feeling as they toasted their host in his remaining bottles of champagne, and made speeches. Then for the last time they joined in singing some of the glees and madrigals that had often echoed within the walls. They knew of his departure on the morrow, grieved deeply that it should be so, but expressed no regrets in their kindly efforts to bridge over an exceedingly painful experience. When they had gone Gilbert took a mallet and broke up several works, not, as has been asserted, for malice, or any other reason than the perfectly logical one to the sculptor, who never allows others to touch his work. He naturally preferred to sacrifice them rather than have them fall into the hands of others, who would have given them to someone to finish and translate into marble. It is clearly impossible for anyone to finish such work except the master who knew his intentions regarding it; and however much one may regret the destruction of that marvel of loveliness "The Enchanted Chair", which was still in plaster, its fate was to be preferred to the alternative of its being travestied.<sup>1</sup>

But what of the rest of his friends? Where were they in the hour of his trouble? Gilbert's experience of the world was now to prove perfectly consistent with other men's in like position. There never was a more apposite saying than "Friends are plenty when the purse is full". A class of parasites invariably flock round the generous, large-hearted man, to vanish instantly at the first intimation that there is nothing more to be gained; like the rats who desert a sinking ship—they scuttle away. Had all Gilbert's friends united in rallying round

<sup>1</sup> The Chantrey Bequest offered to buy "The Enchanted Chair" if it were done in marble. As the artist was unable to afford to have it done, surely some patron of Art missed a great opportunity in not coming forward to secure it for posterity.

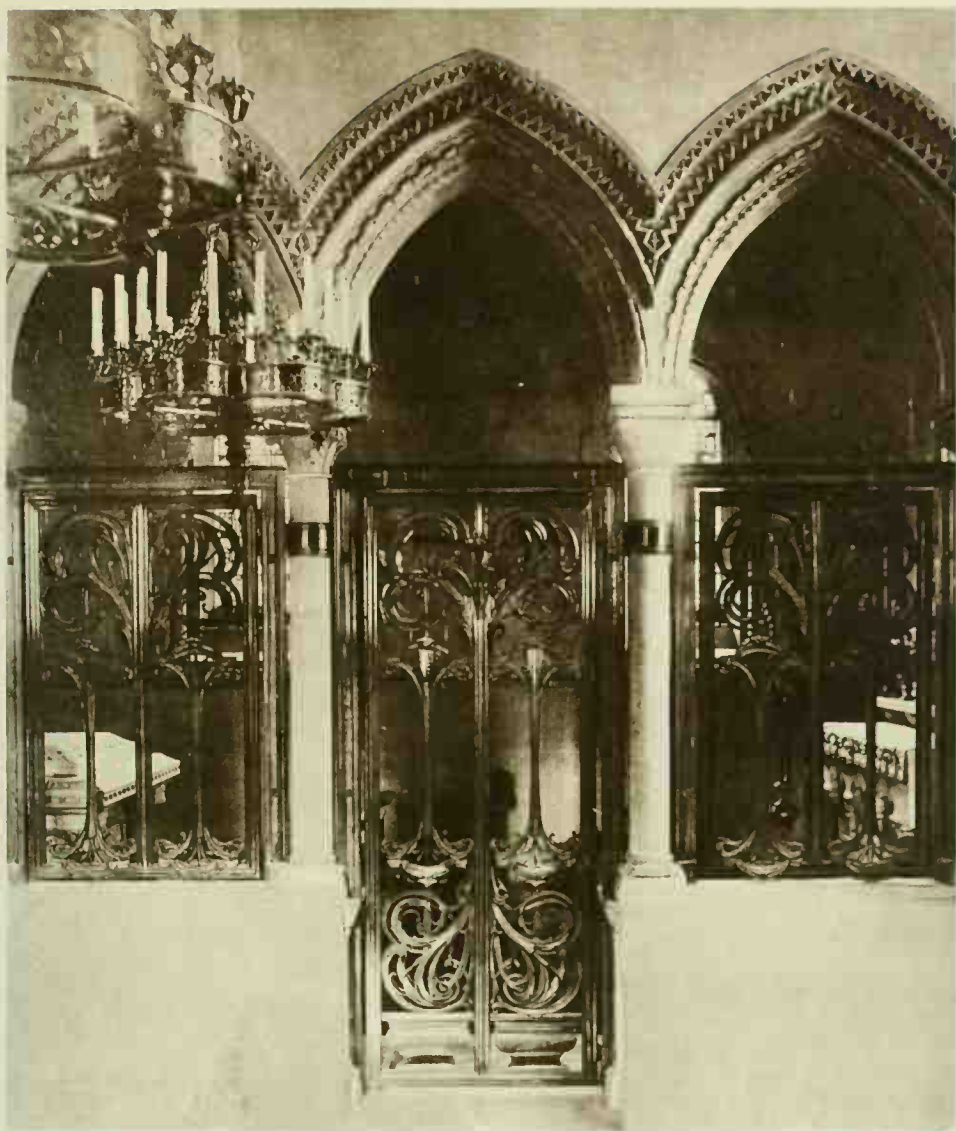


him in his adversity, how different his future years would have been. I wonder how many of the guests who had fed at his table, come to him invariably in their own difficulties, gleaned all the knowledge they were capable of acquiring, risen through his name and efforts on their behalf, plagiarised his works and exploited them—how many ever gave him a thought when the tide of success turned. A writer commenting on the fact that “one of the twelve” was a Judas, says that the same percentage of tares amongst the wheat is always to be found in human nature. Unfortunately, the man with a large heart never troubles to analyse people’s motives nor to discriminate. He accepts people on their face value, and suffers afterwards in silence.

The mention of false friends recalls the existence of another class—equally venomous and detestable, his now active enemies. When Gilbert was at the zenith of his fame they were all round him, lying low, waiting and hoping the day might dawn when they could do him injury.

No man who rises into eminence and no man who is worth his salt ever escapes making many enemies. Gilbert, with his habit of saying what he thought, created them at every turn. Envy of his success changed to rejoicing at his failure, and they left no stone unturned to destroy his high reputation by vile innuendoes and lies. He knew that he was playing into their hands by leaving England, but beset as he was by financial difficulties and domestic responsibilities he thought it was for the best. Would that he had made it only a period of rest in lovely Bruges, then to return in triumph, as Rembrandt did, after losing two fortunes! But Gilbert’s desire was to escape to solitude, where his fellow-men could neither worry nor disappoint him. He was deeply wounded in his feelings over his work. Like his friend Boehm, he knew that so long as he practised in England he would be besieged by people, and his time would never be his own, but unlike his friend, he detested society with its hollow pretences and frivolities.

His career had been almost too successful at an early age, and like a meteor he flashed into silence, of his own will and purpose. He must have felt like Cardinal Wolsey when he fell from favour, the man of



*Photo Kirk*

SCREEN TO THE PRINCE HENRY OF BATTENBERG MEMORIAL CHAPEL, WHIPPINGHAM CHURCH.  
Erected, 1897. Sketch-model exhibited Royal Academy, 1899. Pages 137-138, 164



boundless ambition who built himself a palace a king might envy. But Gilbert never deserved his fall, and the only palace he erected was his palace of dreams. His aims and Wolsey's were poles asunder.

Gilbert has always been actuated by the highest aims in art ever sought by man. A more unworldly outlook than his it would be impossible to conceive. It is an attitude of mind that the worldly cannot understand. His Art is his religion and very life—no taint of money must influence him. He has been the same since boyhood. Wolsey, on the other hand, loved power, worked for it, and subordinated everything to it. Wealth meant a kingly power; he made himself wealthy to secure it. Yet there are certain points in these two men's mentalities that are akin. Griffith, in his defence of Wolsey, in *King Henry VIII.* says that "in bestowing . . . he was most princely", and again

Lofty and sour to men that loved him not;  
But to those men that sought him sweet as summer.

Those who know Gilbert will see these points of resemblance.

To the ones who were loyal his old idiosyncrasy recurred. He never explained his position; a certain pride stepped in, and no one knew that in going to Bruges in 1900 he intended to remain there. Had they known they would have tried to alter his decision, for no reason compelled him to leave England. But those who knew something of his temperament, his extreme nervousness, the impetuous spirit that is so easily touched and as readily wounded, and the great obstinacy when he has once made up his mind, think it is very doubtful if any counsellors would have prevailed. Few troubles are past alleviation, but only those who have endured a similar ordeal of public examination of a man's private and personal affairs can have any conception of the agony to a proud and sensitive artist. Gilbert emerged with an abnormal view of the whole matter. He regards life through magnifying glasses; and his mental vision made him behold only the most gloomy ending, disgrace and ruin, when one of a phlegmatic temperament would have considered himself a martyr to untoward circumstances, and realised that ill advice and other people were the source of his misfortunes.

Gilbert crossed by the old-fashioned vessel that used to ply between St. Catherine's Wharf and Ostend. Built in 1844, it was a primitive cargo boat, taking some passengers, called *Alouette*: strange name, "the lark", to bear away from his native shores a man so heavily burdened by many cares. He arrived at Ostend with his wife, and proceeded to "Bruges la Morte". He felt this journey to be a presage of his destiny, from life, full of colour and events, to comparative death; for Bruges, retrospective, remote, and silent, had nothing to offer him of an intellectual character, nothing to remind him of the interests of which he had been the leader and centre. There were many people who never ceased to regret his exodus. His absence was keenly regretted even by those who had never known him personally, but, being real artists, felt that not only London was impoverished, but that it was a national loss to Art. An example of such sympathy is this letter from the late Countess Feodore Gleichen:

THE STUDIO, ST. JAMES'S PALACE,  
September 9.

DEAR MR. GILBERT,

I hope you will forgive me and not think it a great impertinence if I write to tell you how truly sorry I am that you should have had such bad luck with your affairs lately. I wish I could express my indignation with the state of things that makes these difficulties impossible to avoid for the greatest of artists! It seems to force sculpture into being nothing but a commercial undertaking. I should like the whole nation to be held responsible for its stupidity in not understanding that when it has a great man in its midst its duty is to see that his work is not hampered by financial embarrassments. I believe that the English public do not actually realise that a sculptor has more expenses than a painter—and therefore does not appreciate the difference between you—who have done all this splendid work disinterestedly, and the whole of the rest, who pot-boil contentedly all their lives. If I could write or speak I would like to hammer this into all their stupid heads, and I only *trust* that someone who will be listened to will do it. I must apologise again for writing—I am quite aware that you may think I have no business to do so, but my only excuse is that I feel so strongly on the subject, and could not refrain from telling you so.

Yours very sincerely,

FEODORE GLEICHEN.



*The Bookman* voiced their sentiments as follows:

"Mr. Gilbert is modest as he is great. You have never read of his being interviewed. Nor has he arrived at being installed by the *Art Journal*; yet every critic is untiring in praise of his work, and artists concur in giving him the highest place in sculpture. His ambition has always been far above riches, and his work is beyond praise. One is glad to find Mr. M. H. Spielmann, the editor of the *Magazine of Art*, saying this and more for him in his new work *British Sculptors of To-day*, his tribute to Mr. Gilbert being as well written as it is enthusiastic. Mr. Gilbert, for economical reasons, as well as for the restfulness, has taken up his residence in an ancient Flemish city, where he will spend most of the year, visiting London as the necessities of his work may require, and for his Royal Academy Lectureship. 'His work as a whole,' says Mr. Spielmann, 'is almost beyond the range of outside criticism, even as his reputation is beyond harm and attack. His name stands alone as one who has preached in his work a great movement, and, in less than a decade, effected more than any man the salvation of the English School.' It is to be regretted that an artist so universally acclaimed should feel it incumbent upon him to leave London, even for a year or two, but in these days of commercialism it is a godsend to have an artist at the forefront of his profession who does not sell his work for gold alone, but is content to live for his Art rather than by it. Such is our illustrious Watts, the artist painter—Henry Irving, the actor and stage manager, and Alfred Gilbert, sculptor and artist, and artificer in metals."

Gilbert found a house and studio in Bruges and settled down to work, and as year succeeded year, he was hardly conscious of how time had fled, engrossed completely in his work. In solitude he has produced some of the most beautiful things he has ever done—and a larger number than most men. His work proved his only solace in his unhappiness. Sometimes former friends would appear and spend a day with him, talk of old days, and leave with the earnest wish that he would return. It fell upon deaf ears. Gilbert had taken his path, and meant to follow it. His works went to

certain old friends and clients who he knew were capable of appreciating them.

I asked Gilbert what he did in regard to the many artistic societies to which he belonged? He was, for instance, President of the Sculptural Section at Liverpool; on the Consulting Committee of the New Gallery; President of the Surrey Art Circle; Honorary Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects; Honorary Member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-colours; Honorary Member of the Royal Society of British Artists, besides many other societies, including the Western Amateur Glee and Madrigal Society, of which he was President, and musical and scientific bodies which had conferred various degrees upon him. He replied: "From Bruges I sent in my resignation to all, and returned the various honours awarded to me, including my D.C.L. These things meant nothing to me." Then with a smile he added: "Wait; I kept only one token of honour, which you shall see presently. After my statue of Queen Victoria had been unveiled I received a perfectly priceless certificate of merit from . . . *Ally Sloper*! It conferred upon me the Order of F.O.S. (Friend of Sloper). The letter that accompanied it, couched in flowery terms, was so irresistibly witty that I had it framed, and keep it still as a memento!"

After this I was silent, thinking of the strange mentality of this man, with his sense of values so greatly opposed to the world's standards.

GILBERT: "What are you thinking of so busily?"

I (*candidly*): "That I have never known anyone so blind to his own interests as you!"

GILBERT: "That is probably true. The fact is, when I am in a working mood, no outside consideration appears of the slightest value, and if someone came and told me that a commission of £1000 awaited me by going at once to accept it, I should inevitably let it go."

About this time Gilbert formed a friendship with the painter Francis Petrus Paulus, who with his wife came to live in Bruges, and had a home in the quaint *Marché aux Herbes*. Mr. Paulus painted

every nook and corner of the lovely old city, and still declares he could spend a lifetime there without exhausting his subjects. A true colourist and an unique exponent of landscapes crowded with moving figures, his market-scenes, and men working in dark cellars have an irresistible charm, which his countrymen especially value. He painted his friend Gilbert, and his mother, in 1909—and Gilbert did a bust in bronze of him. Mrs. Paulus, though not practising as an artist, is a fine judge of art, and her husband's best critic. Their home was an example of her taste, and she was always the chief mover in any good enterprise in Bruges.

After some years in Bruges, Gilbert started a school for Art, and this he did, as usual, from an entirely altruistic motive, his desire being to help those who wished to study Art seriously, to make it possible for those who could not afford the fees to get a thorough knowledge of the subject. He, therefore, took a house, engaged a matron, and provided every comfort for the students and every facility for learning. The cost to the student was so absurdly small that, of course, it could not pay the generous founder; but that was a small matter to him when he embarked on the enterprise, full of optimism, and determined to give them all he knew. He intended it to be for professional students, but the ideal pupil was not forthcoming to test his theories. Instead, those who appeared seemingly full of zeal were only amateurs by nature, and proved mentally incapable of profiting by his self-sacrifice. They enjoyed the advantages offered freely, but never put forth any real effort to conquer their difficulties. They were only the average students who flock to Art Schools for a time, generally on rainy days, and never accomplish anything worth while. After a time Gilbert found they wanted amusement and complained that Bruges was fearfully lacking in this respect. Meanwhile it was an extremely expensive hobby for the Head, besides taking up an immense amount of his time, and he abandoned his experiment. Whilst his school was in full swing he made a generous offer, which, happily for his own interests, was not accepted. The Reverend Arthur Hull was Chaplain to the English Church; the building was a very poor one, with a particularly

hideous interior. Gilbert suggested that he and his pupils should enrich it with decorations as a labour of love. Mr. Hull realised that it would entail too much work on the patron, and so it was left undone. Yet, if it had been possible, a great contribution to Art would have been secured, and, just as Memling left his mark for all time in the Hospital of St. John, this proposed memorial, if carried out, would have stood for the ages to come.

In 1902 Gilbert's father died, after a long illness, and his mother some years after decided to give up her home and spend her remaining life with her son. Gilbert's wife had gone to England to visit her children, when a letter arrived in Bruges announcing his mother's coming. Great preparations were made to receive her in his home, and he went off to meet her at Ostend with a light heart. Her arrival changed his outlook; it doubled his happiness and halved his sorrows. The ever-wonderful mother with her artistic perceptions revelled in Bruges, and in his ancient house, umber and grey, with heavily mullioned windows, quaint steps leading to adorable old rooms. It had been a monastery hundreds of years ago, and the old-world garden, full of flowers, was enclosed by high walls. Bruges is a city of beautiful houses, and Gilbert's home in the rue des Corroyeurs Blancs was a notable example, with harmonious proportions and a certain austere and eclectic character. His studio was a stable transformed into a suitable place for working.

This period was the beginning of a St. Martin's summer in the lives of both mother and son. It was almost a renewal of his boyhood's days, and as they used to walk about Bruges arm-in-arm even the cold-natured and material Brugeois would melt into smiles and pleasant greetings for "little Madame", as she was called. She quickly caused her power to be felt as a hostess and home-maker, and of an evening she exercised her charms of music. Meanwhile his Aunt Susannah, who never was far away from his mother, appeared in Bruges too. A friend who knew them all very well says:

"One of the prettiest memory pictures I can recall is of these two famous sisters singing with Gilbert Mendelssohn's part-songs, 'I would that my love' being the favourite." Imagine, then, those



wonderful old ladies, both past eighty, singing so sweetly and tune-fully, quaintly dressed and quite in keeping with the surroundings, the dim shadowy panelled walls illumined by the soft radiance of candle-light, with Gilbert's robust figure, massive head with its shock of fair hair, forming a strong contrast to the fragile little old ladies, who were still endowed with all that surprising vigour of mind that characterised James Cole's descendants.

Gilbert was occupied in his studio all day. He was producing a "Victory", a figure with outstretched wings and flowing draperies, light, joyous, triumphant. It was commissioned for Leicester, but the artist was dissatisfied with it, and did it a second time. Whilst it was in progress, some enemies wrote to the papers and even dared to express a doubt that it had been begun. The photograph shows that they were mistaken. Whilst the contention waxed furiously an idler and busybody found nothing better to do with his time than to try to find out what had happened to the "Victory". He came to prove that it was not made and evidently hoped this was the case. Gilbert being away, he did not disdain to borrow a ladder from across the street, and mounting it, tried to peer through the glass roof. The ladder was too short for a bird's eye view, and all he could see was the side of one of the walls of the studio, which suited his purpose better. He could now say that he had looked and had not seen the "Victory". This he did say, to his disgrace. What would have happened to him if Gilbert had found him on that ladder will never be known. He has passed, like many other bitter enemies of the artist, of whom, he can say, like the Psalmist, "They came about me like bees, and are extinct even as the fire among thorns".

Miss Ellen Terry used to pay a visit to Bruges every summer, and stay at the Panier d'Or, a quaint hotel in the Grand' Place. During her visits delightful excursions were taken, and canal picnics, and parties were given by the Gilberts in her honour. Always full of vitality, humour, and fascination, the great actress brought sunshine and laughter to those around her, so that her coming was looked forward to as the signal of rejoicing.

Gilbert was now to encounter the greatest loss and the deepest



sorrow he has ever known, one impossible to estimate fully, the breaking of a perfect bond of union. His mother's long and wonderful life came to a close in 1910, and her son in his passionate grief felt that all hope and some of his own very life went out with the departure of that gentle passenger to the Silent Land. Time has neither dimmed her memory nor reconciled him to the separation; but his great solace remains that she spent the last years of her life with him; that she was honoured, loved, and cherished.





MEMORIAL TO LORD ARTHUR RUSSELL.

Bronze candelabrum, 1900. In the Bedford Chapel, St. Michael's Church, Chenies, Bucks. By permission of Miss Flora Russell. *Page 162.*

## CHAPTER XIV

### BRUGES



RUGES was the chosen environment of Gilbert for many years. Its carefully preserved examples of mediaeval architecture and relics of the past possess great inspirational value for the painter and writer; and, though many of its ancient archives have been destroyed by fire, it is exceedingly rich in unique treasures.

It was a city before the seventh century, and it grew and flourished until the close of the fifteenth century, when its decline became rapid. For hundreds of years Bruges shared the wool-trade with England and Venice, and was the great meeting-place of the richest merchants in Europe. It was the centre, too, of most brilliant gatherings of kings, princes, and nobles; tournaments, pageants, and carnivals of a most gorgeous description were often held. Under the Dukes of Alva Art was encouraged greatly, and Bruges became an artistic centre with a brilliant colony of artists which owed its inception to the first three great Primitives. In looking at the marvellously constructed houses and buildings one realises that every builder must have been an artist besides an accomplished craftsman, must have loved beauty of form and colour; poetry and art illuminated their lives, and were incorporated with their work.

Art is the inheritance of the aristocracy of brains. In that great scheme affecting our lives which we call destiny, men born of different races and characteristics become united into one brotherhood to form the links in a successive chain, their mission being to practise and teach what beautifies and elevates other men's lives. Each one carries on the traditions of the past, making of the present what in process of time becomes firmly welded to the past. It would take too long to speak of the architects, scholars, and administrators who helped to weave the fabric of Bruges the Magnificent, in the great days when it was called "the Watergate to Wealth". Suffice it to mention the



three Primitive painters—Hans Memling, and Hubert and Jan van Eyck.

Bruges is a city of paradoxes. No nation has ever set a higher value on its national treasures, which are to be seen in the museums and churches to-day; yet they allowed, even encouraged, a constant warfare for hundreds of years, with its inevitable ruin and loss. The ancient cathedral and other great buildings were destroyed by fire, and the belfry "thrice consumed and thrice rebuilt". Strange that out of a senseless war Bruges should have become permanently enriched! The legend runs that the spiritual Hans Memling, a poor wounded soldier, found sanctuary from the storms of life in the Hospital of St. John, and in return for the primitive surgery and nursing at which we should shudder to-day, produced during the weariness of convalescence such a wealth of Art as to cause the world to wonder ever since. He was aptly described as "the greatest painter in Christendom", through the spirit that quickened and informed his Art. Go to the Hospital of St. John and see how large was his conception of his subjects, though meticulous in treatment and perfect finish of details. Notice the distribution of the masses, and arrangement of design; the glowing colours like the heart of a rose, the pearly quality of the lily, the mellowed radiance that permeates all that he did, and give thanks for the Art that uplifts, and symbolises beauty for ever. Nothing that is being produced to-day can compare with it. Sargent, shortly before his death, came to Bruges and spent his time studying it.

My thoughts turn next to the brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck, who brought to perfection the art of fusing colour with oil, and dipped their brushes in sunlight as they transmitted their thoughts to canvas; and the same sunshine that was a very part of their being must have entered their home in the rue St. Gilles, where they lived with their brother Lambert, and Marguerite their sister, who was also a painter, an accomplished miniaturist. Hubert, twenty years Jan's senior, was a recluse, who in the silence and solitude followed where inspiration led him. In later years he retired to Ghent, where, assisted by his brother Jan, he painted "The Adoration of the Lamb"



—his swan song. Jan van Eyck occupied the curious position of *peintre et valet de chambre* to “*Jean sans Pitié*”, and later was attached to Philippe l’Asseure’s Court, where his duties led him to undertake two secret journeys which arouse one’s curiosity. Yet his position did not seemingly interfere much with his amazingly great art. As a colourist he was unrivalled, and he surpassed his brother in technique. Truth and fidelity to their principles were the basic stand of both men. Jan, with a greater realism than Hubert, yet made it conform to the triumph of the ideal.

These three great Masters of the World once trod the same cobble-paved streets the inhabitants tread to-day, and the same bell-music was the accompaniment to their thoughts. Over the fair city of “Bruges la Morte” floats the haunting melody, wild and sweet, plaintive and sad, the sound modulated by canal-waters, ever changing, according as each listener interprets the messages.

There followed a succession of artists, but ere long Italy was the scene of their triumphs. From Giotto to Botticelli, Raphael to Michael Angelo, Veronese and Titian, they shone and flourished until Holland became the cradle of Art and Rembrandt was the master mason. Spain had her turn in producing Velasquez and his contemporaries, then came France and England with her eighteenth-century glories.

Early Victorian times produced Turner, and later, Millais and Burne Jones; and in sculpture Alfred Stevens, and later, Gilbert, who is with us to redeem the stagnation in Art of the present day. For, notwithstanding the stacks of canvas and tons of pigment frittered away, the harvest is lamentably poor. Men have lost fine vision—perhaps it has been withheld on account of its misuse. Gilbert, in speaking of this, says:

“The worship of Mammon has become so inherent in mankind that he who refuses to sacrifice at the Shrine, even to the last of his most sacred possessions, is regarded as a heretic and incidentally as a fool. Contemplate for a moment this unrighteous creed. Look back, if you dare risk being turned into a pillar of salt, upon the recent happenings, and if you have eyes to see through the salt glaze upon

them, bear witness to the sort of propitiatory offerings in memory of the victims that have been evoked. Why, they are not even of lead, but mere dross! The artist has succumbed and lost his power in the dazzling glamour of Mammon, and has been powerless to make even a Brazen Calf, let alone a Golden one."

The sculptor's art being entirely different from that of the painter, it is greatly to be wondered at that Gilbert was enabled to go on working diligently in Bruges for so many years, for it affords no opportunities whatever—indeed is full of disadvantages—to the sculptor. Change of ideas, too, are necessary, and some intellectual companionship. He was deprived of a good deal of real pleasure during those years without the revivifying influences of the everyday interests he had been used to all his life. Appreciation was entirely lacking in Bruges, and all enthusiasm and knowledge of Art. What did the inhabitants know of these things, or of the world-wide celebrity in their midst? Had they recognised his power and acclaimed him as England welcomed Dalou and Lanteri, Gilbert would have enriched Bruges for all time, even as Hans Memling. Bruges missed an opportunity which will never recur, for he will not return to live there again. One can imagine with what enthusiasm he would have been welcomed had he lived when a robust race of thinkers dwelt in mediaeval Bruges.

The time had now come when it was necessary for Gilbert to have a studio and foundry in Brussels, where his castings could be carried out under his supervision. He spent a considerable time there and executed many works, amongst others the famous mantel-piecc—now in Leeds Museum—for Mr. Sam Wilson.

His meeting with Mr. Wilson came about in the following way. One day Gilbert was walking beside one of the many canals that intersect Bruges, and an artist was at work painting the scene. Gilbert was attracted by the artist's methods, and entered into conversation with him. This proved interesting to both men, and the master came again to watch Mr. Senior's process of working in pure colour on canvas. Many topics were discussed, and Mr. Senior gave news of the outer world. One day he expressed a wish that Gilbert should

meet his friend, Mr. Sam Wilson, who wanted to secure some work in sculpture. Soon after this, Mr. Wilson appeared in Bruges, and a close friendship began, which lasted until death severed it. Mr. Wilson was an unusually fine connoisseur; he was forming a unique collection of the best works of his generation, which he left to his wife for her lifetime, afterwards to become the property of his native town of Leeds. His name will ever be remembered for his munificence in buying works and in giving commissions to artists, acting on his own unerring artistic judgment.

One of the most upright of men, his death at the end of the War was felt as a calamity by all who knew him. His generous spirit was shown to those who worked for him. He was a great employer of labour, and proved throughout his useful life that the master and men can share the same interests. He never required any trade union to settle disputes, for none ever arose, and wherever Sam Wilson went harmony ensued. He was seconded in all his good works by his affectionate and sympathetic wife. Gilbert has pleasant memories of several visits he paid to the Wilsons, at their beautiful home outside Leeds. A chimney-piece for his dining-room was in course of construction. He asked if Gilbert would undertake to ornament it, leaving the artist free to choose his own subject. Gilbert, whose mind was particularly retrospective at the time, determined to tell his own history in a series of allegories, knit together into a complete ensemble. But whilst this was being worked out he suffered a serious interruption. He was obliged to leave his home and studio, and go to Brussels. The thread of his thoughts was broken, and he found himself totally incapable of grasping them again. It entailed a further two years' work. He now pursued another plan, and, as he has often done, he began to work anew.

Mr. Wilson, with his sympathetic understanding of Gilbert's mind, abandoned his former plan, and asked for an entire chimney-piece. When it was completed Mrs. Wilson requested the artist to write an account of how it came into being, which he did in a series of letters composed at intervals. Gilbert says:

"After reflection the obvious answer came. A chimney-piece or

domestic hearth is one of the most suggestive adjuncts to an Englishman's home, for 'Each man's chimney is his golden mile-stone—the central point from which he measures every kingdom in the world around him'.

"Around his chimney he assembles his nearest and dearest in loving reunion before it, here he dispenses hospitality to friends and acquaintances. It is the background to his impersonation of the head of the house, welcomer to his chosen guests, and dispenser of courtesies to those who seek his benefaction, counsel or mere acquaintance. The hearth is the most sacred and imposing spot in a home. The hallowed shrine in his lay temple which sanctifies his authority. At this shrine he places the representation of his wife, mother, or child, failing either of these some ancestor, just as an ancient Greek would have done by some Deity, and a modern one by his Pxor, or sacred symbol. And as a Roman would have dealt with the Lares and Penates. Thus the Hearth came to be the 'Holy of Holies' in domestic life."

In another letter he continues:

"For the portrait it will be well to explain my views upon the art of portraiture in general, that you may understand my reason for making this particular one symbolical rather than literal. As a symbol of choice possession it called for as rich and costly a setting as I could contrive, a shrine-like surrounding rather than a mere framing.

"I have always held strong and possibly debatable views upon the subject of portraiture in its highest form in Art, *i.e.* the portrayal of an individual by method of manual intellectual skill. Manual skill alone may produce an excellent likeness, yet not a complete portrait, for although it may hold spectators spellbound through its resemblance, it conveys nothing through the painted mask of the soul-qualities hidden behind the living original's features. Such a portrait must be but an ephemeral resemblance, suggesting no biography! A portrait which is the production of skill and intellectual insight combined is a complete one, for it portrays the mind and the likeness together!



"The ideal union of Man with Woman is that which unites him in such unity that the soul of each is reflected in that of the other. I would have had your portrait suggest that of your husband within it, though I chose to represent you alone as his most valued possession enshrined. Your portrait then had to be not a mere personal resemblance of you, but reflect a suggestion of your jointship (your husband) through the adjuncts forming the details of the composition.

"My next thought was directed to a scheme of colour. As the picture was to 'the Castle of Home' with a frame of an elaborate structure in bronze, the colouring of the picture should be such as to secure its predominance in the whole work, and yet not interfere with the limited possibilities available for the artificial oxidation of the bronze to harmonise with it. The result was a harmony in flesh-colour, gold, grey, and green. I do not pretend to be a painter, for, if I did, my lack of experience in technique, added to my views in general on the beautiful art of painting, would continue to render my efforts quite as disastrous to my life as have done those in Sculpture, in which I may lay claim to some practical experience and a lifetime's devotion. My inefficiency, however, is no bar to my calling in making attempts, however primitive, in the art of Painting, as a most valuable auxiliary to the practice of my own art.

"I see very little evidence in the pictorial art of the present day that painters entertain the same devotion to plastic art, or regard its value to their own efforts." Again he writes later:

"Although I have subordinated my grey, it nevertheless forms the chief note in the 'motif', in that it embodies the truth of that strange impulse which led me in suggesting an ideality foreshadowing a fatality! That richly adorned head, closely but lightly veiled, like a bride, with a huge pearl on the forehead depending upon a partly concealed wreath of coloured flowers, jewels and gold, looks out from a dark background over a balance, upon which two statuettes representing the same figure of Anteros, reflective and mature love, as opposed to Eros or Cupid, the frivolous tyrant. The one is of gold, the other of lead. The slight shadow from the golden figure passes faintly away, the other figure casts its shadow, a dark one, over the



region of the heart, but reached no further than the commencement of her throat, as though to desist from harming or disfiguring. Both figures have their backs turned to the outlooking face of the 'motif'. 'For better—for worse—for richer—for poorer—till death us do part.' I leave you awhile to unravel for yourself any further meaning which may suggest itself."

Again he writes:

"The whole of the plastic picture is grey, with the exception of two infinitesimal suggestions of gold. The one just over the centre of the great couch upon which a man's agonised body lies, neither sleeping temporarily, nor for all Eternity, only indifferent to all passing around. At his head one of the couch-posts has been torn away and is being carried off by the draped spectral figure, while from behind the lower end of the couch appears a woman bearing a symbol of Peace and Victory. This is the other golden spot. This apparition has failed to attract the attention or interrupt the sport of a pair of Apes, intent upon a mysterious and sinister game on the floor. This symbolises a Dream of Joy during a Sleep of Sorrow. Is one ever so sorrowful as to be entirely bereft of Hope and all consolation?"

Gilbert gives the following description of groups at the end of the chimney-piece.

"The bas-relief over the centre of the chimney-board symbolises the dual nature of man, without which life would be ill-balanced through the lack of contrasts, by which the relative positions of 'good' and 'ill' are determined. Thus 'The Sleep of Sorrow' has its contrast in 'The Dream of Joy', and the supporting groups typify the sanguine and the despondent dispositions. The one on the right as one faces the chimney-piece is the former. I will take the latter first. Here I have portrayed the sorrowing effects of evil report—the chattering Ape's attitude, a magnifying glass before her natural vision, and the objects around thereon. 'Love', held captive by her grasp of its wings, becomes a lifeless weight in her hand, and all others are exaggerated or distorted."

In a letter to Mr. Sam Wilson Gilbert says:



MEMORIAL TO WILLIAM GRAHAM OF BURNTSHIELDS, RENFREWSHIRE.  
Bronze plaque, in Glasgow Cathedral. By permission of H.M. Office of Works



"My work cannot be judged by the standards which obtain and are accepted in England. It is personal, and in no way reflects the works of others. From beginning to end it is pure invention, and therefore composition of a personal and original character. Thus it is a strain upon my individual efforts, and these cannot be exercised in the same way that those of the mere copyist are mechanically dealt with. My endeavours are a constant contribution to what should constitute copyright, but alas! it only furnishes the contractor in art with material to produce on the cheap and expeditious delivery copy work for which he has not bled, but is ready to bleed those who are ignorant of the procedure in art.

"It is for this reason that the makers of statues can always count upon making their fortunes, backed by an early gained reputation, while the originator of ideas goes to the wall. True art is a profession, but it has come to be regarded as a commercial enterprise, because those who practise art recognise the futility of contending against the conventional idea, that all production is mechanical, and therefore that their work is such.

"A machine is constructed to pay by its produce its initial cost, and its upkeep, but a human being cannot be made to think and create by force of monetary outlay. I am endeavouring to make something for you that no one can copy, simply for the reason that any artist that I know would not even attempt the sacrifice of personal gain and mental quietude which my efforts cost me. I have been libelled, persecuted, and driven into exile for my obstinate adherence to a principle, a matter of small moment to me. For I know I am right, and besides I have the conviction that my works, when I am dead and gone, will be regarded as my own children, and not the copies of creations of others preceding me. I would rather be the real father of a cripple, than the reputed parent of a beauty actually begotten by someone else. My skull is too hard and fixed now to permit complaisantly of the growth of horny excrescences, and my nature too stubborn to borrow of other folks' brains. Your famous Square in Leeds is nothing but a museum which has cost many thousands more than was ever paid to the originators of borrowed objects. I



will see to it that your house at Newton Potter is far away from 'the madding crowd' and any such reproach."

One of the snares besetting the sculptor's path is the continual piracy that goes on of the producer's works. In 1914, just before the War, Gilbert wrote the following letter in regard to the barefaced traffic in his works:

"Once again I have to warn the public against purchasing any work purporting to come from my hands from dealers, or others who cannot produce a written authorisation signed by me, and declaring its authenticity. I have been made aware of the traffic in my work over and above the number that I know to be in existence legitimately. Two new specimens have just come to my notice. These purport to be unique productions in bronze. They are both of them cast from very old sketches in plaster, which I believed I destroyed years ago. The one is entitled 'Kiss of Victory', the other was a first sketch for a small group, one of a number of subjects of its size, destined for the tomb of the Duke of Clarence, but abandoned for a better rendering, upon which I am actually engaged at the present time. For obvious reasons, in view of the present circumstances, I refrain from giving the subject of the sketch.

"Sculptors seem powerless to protect themselves from the shameless piracy and theft of their endeavours. Signing of work seems to be no protection: failure to do so would appear equally futile, and this may be exemplified from the fact that in South Kensington there exists a statuette, in a case containing three others purporting to represent me, which is boldly signed in Roman letters. I never sign my work in such fashion, but in a manner of my own, known solely to myself.

"Against copying and downright plagiarism I know there is no other protection but the possibility of ridicule which such acts are calculated to bring upon their perpetrators, but it seems that ready material gain, with slight mental outlay, or rather at the expense of other folks' endeavours, is a safe and all too tempting a bait to the unscrupulous and mediocre dabbler masquerading as an artist.

"I never used either of the above-mentioned works as a means



of helping myself, even at times when a contribution through their sale would have been most welcome; and as a proof of this I thought them destroyed with many other efforts which I deemed unworthy of presentation years ago. It is therefore hard that these self-same models should be resuscitated by an unscrupulous thief for his own gain and my confusion. What I have said illustrates the tragedy of an artist's life.

"The comedy is close at hand, for the spectacle of the wary purchaser going to the dealer to purchase a work of art (with taste thrown in!)—and gleefully paying at least twenty-five per cent more than he might have had the same work from the artist direct, is humorous, and after he has been imposed upon, his discomfiture is a further source of merriment to all, especially the artist, and all sympathy is denied him. He is as amusing as the man who is despoiled by the card-sharper he hoped to despoil.

"There are many bogus things in South Kensington Museum still, for which big prices have been paid, and indeed there are few Collections free of such proofs of official incompetence or gullibility. They are not questioned, because it is nobody's business. The arbiters in such cases are generally men of position, amateurs by predilection, victims most easy, often notorious, artists never. Is it to be wondered at then that from time to time such scandals as the one that arose after the purchase of the so-called 'Rokeby Venus', should arise? The dispute was not as to whether it was a fine work of art, which it is, but as to its authenticity as a work by Velasquez, a commercial, not an artistic matter of importance. Napoleon the First was a Seer after all, and one it would seem of some discernment, when he styled the English 'A Nation of shopkeepers'."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WAR



PAINTERS have always found a sense of satisfaction in reproducing the mysterious warm grey qualities that enfold the ancient city of Bruges; but Gilbert says that Bruges is best seen by night, when the buildings appear as dark masses outlined against the sky and, seen thus, assume a greater grandeur, whilst certain new houses and restorations that look garish by daylight become lost in shadows.

The winter of 1913-14 was an unusually severe one in Bruges, with the canals frozen for weeks, and a biting frost reigned. One of the most imposing and magnificent views is the Grand' Place by moonlight, with the hôtel de ville and belfry powdered by frost and gilded by the moon. I can recall the scene as it appeared on the last evening of a visit to Bruges before the War. The *estaminet* windows gave forth a flood of yellow light; soldiers in uniform were to be seen inside, engaged in the peaceful occupation of playing dominoes whilst drinking a friendly *bock*. From the belfry came the sound of carillons played by a master hand, whilst the figures thronging the Place contained a variety of types and costumes infinitely picturesque. Brown-robed friars, with shaven heads and sandalled feet, walked beside others clad in white. Nuns in their sombre dress, with the white coifs that illumine their faces, passed serenely on their errands of mercy. Old Brugeois women, in close-fitting bonnets and quaint cloaks, and children formed a picture reminiscent of some old Master's skill, and all was redolent of the past of which Bruges ever speaks so eloquently and with a certain pathos. In the Place is a monument to Jan Breydel and his brother butchers, who went out armed only with their knives, and drove away the invaders in the thirteenth century. Despite the tranquillity of that evening, the Angel of Death was already brooding over the city, and the hand was writing on the wall, "Your kingdom shall be taken and given

to another''. Alas, that there was no Daniel found to interpret the message!

Meanwhile the inhabitants prospered, all unconscious of impending tragedy. Belgium, though one of the smallest nations, was the richest in proportion to its size. Rents were exceedingly low; houses could be bought for a mere song; food, always of the best quality, was cheap; the Brugeois, frugal, and very industrious, saved money, and were a contented race of people.

Thus life flowed along easily until war came and changed the whole outlook upon life. The resistance of the invasion of Belgian territory meant death and destruction to the nation; but Belgium, counting upon England's promise, gallantly attempted to withstand the great hordes of Germans flung against her. Neither the Belgians nor the British realised fully what war meant.

In July, only a week before the inhabitants became aware that the calamity was inevitable, an English resident in Bruges wrote to a friend who was coming to visit her: "Rumours of War are about us. In the present unsettled state of affairs it is better to postpone your visit until things have *quieted down*!" How little she dreamt of the serious character of war can be gauged by her letter; but she knew later, and fled from Bruges before the Germans entered.

Gilbert received the news very quietly; he had no illusions about the fighting taking place in a prescribed area, to which it would be confined, and a quick ending being the result. He could remember the war in 1870, and five years later, living in Paris, heard first-hand of the way the Germans treated the French, and of their barbarous methods and callous natures. Of all the people in Bruges, he knew best what was in store for those who remained. His imagination and knowledge of history led him to form an accurate idea of the horrors of war, and his calculation led him to the conclusion that it would last four years, instead of a few months, as some optimists insisted would be the case. Gilbert could have left Bruges easily during the first month after war had been declared. He refused, because he felt he could be of use to others, and when in September

his friends departed for England he saw them off cheerfully, and withstood their entreaties to accompany them.

His home and studio, containing many works, helped his decision, and he chose to take the risks of all that he saw would probably ensue—the destruction of his work, the loss of his life, and in any case, some years of misery. He soon witnessed many changes, the departure of all men of service age followed swiftly by the news of the deaths of numbers of them. Soon there were only women, children, and old men left in Bruges. No newspapers were published, and rumours flew about at a great rate; nobody believed them.

Gilbert kept a diary, for the benefit of a friend. The following are some extracts:

*“Wednesday, October 21st, 1914.*—There was nothing much to record, and even had there been, I should have been obliged to desist from continuance of the strain of constant watching and brooding over the wretched position. Rumours and wild reports of slaughter, and possible immediate deliverance, were many and various, but, as usual, all without foundation or the slightest sign of effect. One of these reports declared that America, through its Consul-General, has notified that Bruges must be immediately evacuated, and that the Railway Station, which is said to be in a sad state, must be thoroughly cleansed, together with all the streets! I don't think this is a very likely order to be obeyed, even if it were given. In any case, there is no sign of any move towards evacuation, and the time-limit has long passed.

“I attribute the report to the fact that the motor car of the Consulate, flying the American flag, was a good deal in evidence yesterday, and I saw it again this morning, probably on its return journey to Ghent, for it passed here going at great speed towards the Porte St. Croix.

“It is a week to-day since the commencement of the occupation, and I am inclined to believe that my surmise earlier as to Bruges being used as a base is in fact justified. I should not be at all surprised to hear that the ‘basin’ will be used as a sort of dockyard for the

reconstruction of torpedo-boats and such like craft, transported here in sections overland.

"Zeebrugge is certainly in the enemy's hands, and so is the whole length of the canal leading there. What gives colour to my supposition is that there are a good many naval officers and sailors in the town, and there appears to be extra activity in the direction of the Port Maritime.

"2 P.M.—To-night, a heavy convoy of wagons carefully sealed—all automobiles—driven and attended by sailors has just passed; it seems to have had a long and dirty journey. This is being followed by innumerable heavy covered vehicles marked Mulheim-an-der-Ruhr. All seem to have been on the march for some time. They are going in the direction of the town, so I suppose they are *en route* for some destination farther on. Can they be bound for Zeebrugge? Am used now to the trembling of the house, but were I not, I should really have grave fears for its stability. On consulting my Encyclopaedia I learn that Mulheim-on-the-Ruhr is an important manufacturing place near Essen, and, as one of its chief industries is in machinery and iron-work, I should not be surprised to find my supposition will be confirmed.

"It has also another most serious look, that the whole coast-line from Flushing to Calais must be in the hands of the enemy, for one would think they would hardly venture to push forward such stores on chance.

"I can't imagine where all the stores of grain are coming from, for the last two days, all day long, wagons laden with huge sacks have continued to pass towards St. Croix. All this cannot be wanted for the troops here, for there is little or no cavalry in the town, at least in the barracks at this end. I am wondering if it forms part of the war-levy on the town. Speculation, however, is quite futile. The thing which troubles me most is the absence of any hope of our being relieved of the presence of our unwelcome visitors. The only activity in any business way is in the cafés, where a brisk trade in drink, sour beer chiefly, is going on. There is one advantage in this, that the men before getting drunk upon the stuff will get seriously sick and ill, as



they are not used to such liquor. Of course, it is impossible to say how far the sale of spirituous liquors is being observed. I fear the Brugeois will risk infringement of the order. May they be flayed if caught, for our peace depends upon the sobriety of the troops!

"If the transportation of grain goes on much longer, bread will rise to a prohibitive price, already the ordinary loaf is 2 centimes dearer than it was a week ago, and yet one constantly sees waste in the street, and if one offers a loaf to the folk who constantly come to beg, they will refuse it, or worse, throw it away the moment they think themselves out of sight.

"4 P.M.—Now more huge guns are passing, a whole battery, I should think they are not field artillery, for they are too heavy, they look more like siege-guns, but why are they going towards St. Croix and where have they come from? Is it a part of a retreat after all? There is no possibility of getting any news of any kind.

"It is a marvel to me where all the Belgian troops have disappeared to, they are known to have retreated from Antwerp before its occupation, and indeed some of them have been engaged in small encounters since. Some say they have retreated over the French frontier, but I cannot see how that can be; since the enemy, when last we heard of him, had his back to the Belgian border, and this would prevent any junction between the Belgians and the French.

"How it comes about that the Germans were able to march upon Bruges from whatever quarter, is a mystery to all here.

"There is no suggestion even of any obstacle having been offered between Ghent and here, the reports of heavy firing heard a few hours before the entry of the German troops have been accounted for, and it turns out to have been blank firing, purely as a form of intimidation. One man of the enemy was killed and another wounded within a stone's throw of the town, but it is supposed by some sharp-shooter. In reply to this Dr. Dumont, who happened to be driving nearby, on his return from some professional visit, had his horse killed, and in jumping from his carriage is said to have fallen and hurt his knee. Fortunately no other reprisals appear to have been attempted, and this inclines me to think that much of the terrible vengeance





*Photo. Hollyer*

THE HONBLE. JOHN NEVILE MANNERS.  
BORN 1892. KILLED IN ACTION, 1914.

Bronze bust. By permission of the Honble. Mrs. Arthur Asquith. *Pages 216-217*

visited upon Louvain and Malines was caused by ill-advised and indiscriminate firing on the part of civilians on the entry of troops. The soldier who was billeted on me here declared that women advanced to within close quarters, and then fired 'point-blank' on the incoming troops with revolvers.

"Moreover, he asserted that there were many cases of actual murder committed by civilians in out-of-the-way places in the town, at a time when the Germans thought it to be quiet.

"I mention this for what it may be worth, for it is always as well to hear two sides, and I think my informant, who is a very simple creature, has not the brains to invent his story.

"A band of men have just passed singing the *Wacht am Rhein*. It will be the Styx for many of them. The situation is not without its touches of grim humour, but they are chiefly vulgar grossness, as might be expected of ignorant superstition. A man is said to have fled from his house, which adjoined the cemetery, fearing lest the booming of cannon should awaken the dead! I speak of this with all reserve, for such a tale is too ridiculous, yet it tends to show the trend of mind of the lower class of Flemings, who are notoriously frightened at the sight of death; but that they should have more fear of the buried than of the living is almost incomprehensible.

"I know Flemings, and even some Belgians, who would not pass by the passage by the side of St. Jacques and other similar places after nightfall. Superstition reigns supreme here, all are brought up on it, and are surrounded by its baneful influence from earliest childhood. I could cite many similar examples, but I will content myself with one only, again of grim humour, and this must go to the credit of the enemy. One of many covered wagons passed yesterday labelled *Lustres et articles de Fantaisie*. It was a vehicle which had been seized at Alost from some purveyor of such things, and loaded with rifles and warlike accoutrements.

"*Saturday, October 24th, 1914.*—My daily and hourly record of life-doings had fallen into the form of spasmodic entry of facts and fancies, for the monotony of continual watching, has become so sad that it threatens to revolutionise my whole being, and thus to cripple

my powers of work. I have at times tried to forget all by the aid of my piano, and the beautiful works of Bach, Handel, Mozart, and others—all Germans!—but the effort is vain, for my brain is full of horrors, thus my fingers, its servants, refuse to render all attempts at delicate touch; and so it is also with my work, for heavy thoughts beget clumsy manipulation, and my mind runs off to terrors instead of concentrating itself upon inspiring and tender ideals. I have a desire to fill up my time in forging tools and instruments, but they again require ‘good temper’. Forgive this stupid *jeu de mot*, it refreshes me to laugh, even at my own folly.

“Talking of this desperate state of mind, it reminds me that Despair is generally the parent of Suicide, and this morbid mania seems much in vogue at present. To cite two instances of the many I have heard of lately, it appears that the enemy is not a stranger to the feeling, for report tells of the recent suicide of the General ‘stage-managing’ this part of the theatre of War, who has died by his own hand at Antwerp, and that a subordinate shot himself the other day at Bruges. If the many-headed Hydra of ancient myth was really gifted with the power to grow a new one for everyone lopped off, Report of to-day is gifted with an even greater number of tongues, which never seem to fail, fed as they are by an exuberant imagination, which sets them wagging interminably.

“In my opinion, it is a pity that more do not shoot themselves instead of directing the slaughter of others. Had I my way, I would treat all those inciters to bloodshed, from the highest to the lowest, as the trumpeter of old was treated.

“Sounds of heavy artillery-firing are continuing, apparently not very far distant; in several days past this has been going on without cease from early to late. Most of the troops left yesterday, and were replaced by sailors.

“At about 5 o’clock yesterday I was awakened by the unusual sound of military music, and on going to the window I was surprised to hear our National Anthem. I seized the little English flag which happened to lie at hand on my table, where it had remained rolled up since the passage of the British troops, rushed again to the window,



and was just about to unfurl, and wave it with the accompanying hurrahs, when I not only became aware of a peculiarity in the music, which seemed foreign to our rendering, but I was also struck with the un-English manner of marching, and the peculiar head-covering of the soldiers, that the enemy was at hand. I was only just in time to check my impulse to shout. These troops proved to be Bavarians, and on referring to my invaluable book I learnt that their National Anthem resembled our own. Comedy was never nearer becoming Tragedy, for undoubtedly, had I shouted, I should have been silenced on the spot, and who knows but that my act might have served as a pretence to set fire to the house, and those around.

“A word or two about our National Anthem.

“Its composition has always been attributed to a certain Dr. John Bull, who was born in 1563. This worthy, after having taken the degree of Doctor of Music at Cambridge, was elected lecturer at Gresham College in the City of London. He subsequently travelled much in France, Germany, and many other parts of the Continent, including Flanders, where in each place he was much esteemed. He is supposed to have based his composition on a theme he heard abroad, probably in Bavaria, for this country lays claim to the music, as a national air, as to other of those states I have named. It is traditional throughout Flanders, and as Dr. Bull died at Antwerp in 1628 he may have culled the theme there. Another account says that the National Anthem was composed by John Bull in 1606 for a dinner given by James the First at Merchant Taylors’ Hall in the City of London.

“The Anthem is also ascribed to one Henry Clay, author of ‘Sally in our Alley’ somewhere before 1743. The French appear to have claimed it, and a great controversy arose some years ago without result. If Dr. Bull is allowed to be the author he is certainly not free from the suspicion of being a plagiarist. I once heard Handel called a ‘grand old robber’, but, as the calumniator was a grand old fool and a nonentity, it did not affect my love and admiration for the great Master.

“*Monday*.—One reads charming and soul-stirring romances of

heroic deeds, performed by heroes and patriotic communities beleaguered or held in subjection beyond endurance, but they are for the most part of past history, when the thought of the 'mailed fist' was present the readier and swifter means of destruction and devastation were absent. When one listens to the booming of cannon day by day without cease, one is brought to one's senses, and all dreams of romantic and heroic possibilities are rudely dispelled, and one awakens to the fact that, just as these detonations are each of them the death-note of scores of valiant men, so a single attempt to raise one's voice might bring Eternity to hundreds at the cost of less noise, apart from the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, to the accompanying sharp cracks of a score of rifles, the crackling of burning houses, and the rumble of falling ones. No! there is no romance to-day, and heroism is but mere recklessness and vain glory.

"3 P.M.—Age counts for something after all! It has just saved me from obeying a peremptory proclamation posted at mid-day 'inviting' all English males between sixteen and sixty to leave the town by six o'clock this evening. This news was brought me in imperfect form, the age limit being omitted. I hurried at once to the Place de Bourg to read the Proclamation for myself. Finding that I did not come within the ban and bethinking me of your son Louis, I hastened to the house of Count Visart, who had signed the warning, and he assured me that it did not apply to inhabitants outside the town, and that your son was quite safe. I have, however, despatched a messenger to him to warn him of the Proclamation in case he had not heard of it, and to tell him what I had heard from the Burgo-master; at the same time advising him to give mature reflection to the matter, and to act upon it promptly, should he desire to leave. Doubtless we may expect a domiciliary visit at any moment. It is for this reason that I returned home instead of going to St. Andre."

In the early days of August 1914, after war was declared, the inhabitants of Bruges were filled with forebodings lest England should not arrive in time to aid Belgium. Many were the prayers offered by the devout to the Virgin; then the answer seemed to follow. A wild rumour reached them that the British Forces had started, and that

they would entrain at Ostend and arrive in Bruges. Rejoicing followed. Here was something to relieve the suspense and monotony of waiting, the people made preparations to receive the troops, the city was hung with flags, and brilliantly lighted. All night the Brugeois waited in the streets, but no troops appeared. They were then on their way to relieve Belgium, but had gone via Calais, their secret route leading to Armentières. One of the most wonderful feats of the war was the landing of the first British Army that silently moved up to Armentières without a word being known even in England as to its departure or destination. And what a welcome they received! Nothing was thought good enough for the quiet-voiced friends of Saxon race, blue-eyed and fair, and gentle-mannered and so unlike the swarthy Flemish.

It is recorded that Gregory said when he saw some youths of Anglo-Saxon origin "Call them not Angles, but Angels!" The British Expeditionary Force must have appeared as Angels of deliverance to the frightened inhabitants in the villages of Flanders. The villagers had little to offer, but the British Army was welcome to all they had. But their first request for "hot water" and still "hot water" filled their hosts with amazement. The villagers flew to provide it, marvelling greatly that with their clean appearance they yet wanted to wash! A strange race, the English, a little eccentric in their habits, and fads, to make such a fetish of hot water, with death staring them in the face! They were more surprised when the British Army paid for everything in good English gold, paid for the privilege of fighting for them, and paid more dearly than in gold with their lives. Many a British son, husband, and father sleeps on Belgian soil through keeping a promise made on "a scrap of paper". Can Belgium ever forget what England gave?

Gilbert offered his services several times for enlistment, and was greatly dismayed at being rejected, as he had just turned sixty. He soon ran two very narrow escapes of his life, first in the Post Office, through knocking down a German soldier who treated a nun disrespectfully, puffing a cloud of smoke from his pipe in her face. Gilbert was arrested, and a great excitement ensued. He was brought

before the Governor, where he made his defence, and was fortunate in being able to speak German fluently. When he had explained, the Governor ordered his release, and thanked him. The soldier's leave was cancelled and he was sent to the front the next day.

The second time he was ordered to appear and account for certain statements he had made in public, when he had said that the war would last four years, and that Germany would be beaten. His questioners wanted to know if he received special information? He replied in the negative. Asked how he had formed his opinion that Germany would lose, he replied, "From my knowledge of my own countrymen". He was warned, and allowed to depart home.

His time was fully occupied in meeting the train-loads of wounded, when he would be ready to help, and eased many a sufferer; pitiful wrecks they were, heartrending to witness. Then there were his neighbours, the sick and the aged, to whom he brought comfort. The Brugeois tell of many acts of kindness they received from him. His materials having come to an end, it was impossible for him to carry on his profession. This was one of the greatest of his deprivations. The Germans paid a visit to his house and took every scrap of metal, the copper scuttles, saucepans, even the door handles. A heavy penalty awaited those who kept firearms within their premises. When this news reached Gilbert he had to dispose of his valuable collection of antique pistols and knives, which, though perfectly useless, would be an excuse for tyranny if found, and a menace to his safety. He therefore buried them by night in the garden, and when dug up after the War they were eaten through with rust and in pieces.

The city was under martial law, and everyone had to keep within prescribed limits. No one was allowed in the streets after dark and, except when there was a moon, Bruges was plunged into impenetrable darkness.

Then there was the question of how to provide food for his household. His money quickly came to an end and a terrible problem was before him. Not only this, but the price of food mounted rapidly, and there was difficulty in obtaining it, for everyone was strictly rationed. As the weeks became months, and the months years, hope



had fled. How Gilbert managed to survive the horrible conditions and rigours of the War will never be known. Many a time he walked to some field and would think himself lucky if he could find a turnip to assuage his persistent hunger. As a rule, someone had been before him on the same quest, and he came away without it. He was living at that time in the rue Longue, in a house with a large garden, and some fine fruit trees. One pear tree fortunately yielded a tremendous crop, and pears cooked in a variety of ways became the staple food for his household. I should think he would never want to eat this fruit again.

Frequent deaths occurred through the dropping of bombs. Bombardments became so much a matter of course that they failed to alarm the inhabitants seriously. For greater safety, cellars were fitted up to sleep in, but life seemed a doubtful blessing under conditions too wretched for description. One day a bomb destroyed Gilbert's studio; and with it most of his work of many years, and other valuables. The Government should have compensated him for his great losses, but he got nothing.

Many were the ingenious devices he employed to meet the exigences of life during the War. He made a substitute for coffee from berries. He daily carried on the occupation of cobbler, soling his shoes, and his friends', with paper, until there was none to be procured—then with any material handy.

Every scrap of material was religiously saved in his household during that time of attrition. The margins of newspapers were stuck together, and some of his notes were kept in this way. A statuette of *soap* made by him during the War is still preserved in Bruges.

Gilbert's whereabouts was now a matter of deep concern to his family and friends in England. A report arose, how, no one knows, of his death—but it was not confirmed. It was impossible for a long time to find out. Then, through friends, his elder daughter ascertained from the King of Spain that he was living, and still in Bruges.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile all his sons were serving their country. The eldest

<sup>1</sup> The King of Spain early in the War sent word to the Kaiser that he would hold him responsible for the life and safety of Alfred Gilbert.



joined at the commencement of the War, and was with the artillery. He tried to get leave to go to Bruges to see his father, but was never able to get it. Francis was at sea, and so was the youngest son, Alfredo. His younger daughter, Caprina, was nursing at the Front.

The difficulties during those dolorous years only increased. Gilbert, as he puts it, went to school again. That is to say, he brushed up his knowledge of mathematics and science, studied anew his favourite classical authors, read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* twice through, and the Bible once in English, and then in Greek.

He undertook to teach a Fleming very thoroughly. The man was a plasterer and painter by trade, and made good use of the wonderful advantages offered to him. He learnt modelling and anatomy, history, music, and painting, besides taking a course of literature.

Gilbert's friend, the Reverend Arthur Hull, was one of the few who felt it a duty to stay on in Bruges. After a time he was sent to Germany, where he was interned. He finally went to California.

Owing to the privations he had endured, illness attacked Gilbert and he suffered for six weeks; but his knowledge of medicine served him well, for he prescribed for himself and recovered. But when Armistice Day dawned he was physically a wreck of his former robust self, and so emaciated, haggard, and wan that his old friends could not recognise him. His clothes were in rags, and his shoes without soles. One day the English Admiral arrived in Bruges, and his car was stationed in the Grand' Place. He saw a man threading his way through the many cars and crowds of excited people, whose delight in regaining their long-lost liberty knew no bounds. Gilbert, having reached the Admiral, introduced himself, and a conversation took place between them. The Admiral at once wrote to his son, Commander Francis Gilbert, to tell him he had seen his father.

During the War, Mrs. Alfred Gilbert's death occurred, and he lost his youngest son Alfredo in a naval engagement. The news of his death came after the Armistice to add to his father's sorrows.

One day there arrived at his house a stranger, who proved to be Mr. Erskine Childers, author of the book *The Riddle of the Sands* that prophesied the War some years in advance. He explained that he was



*Photo. 140/100*

ALFRED GILBERT'S STUDIO AT BRUGES, 1904



merely an ambassador from Sargent and two other friends who had asked him to deliver a letter. It contained a cheque towards relieving his difficulties—but Childers, knowing the conditions that would prevail after life in a beleaguered city, had thoughtfully brought a supply of clothing which he offered with tactful and ready sympathy. He proved such a good friend that Gilbert parted from him with regret (Childers had to return to Ireland), and the mutual assurance and hope of meeting again later. This he was destined never to do. Shortly after, the appalling account of Childers' death staggered Gilbert completely, and to this day he has never understood how such a gentle and humane man could have possibly met with the fate of the worst criminal.

After the Armistice, in 1921, Gilbert married Stéphanie du Bourg, a widow, with a grown-up family. They went to England on a visit to Mrs. Wilson, at her beautiful home at Newton Potter, near Leeds. From there they proceeded to London, and thence to Deal, where Gilbert wanted to find a house. At this time houses were not only very difficult to find, but the rents were terribly high, and the conditions exacted prevented him from taking one. So they returned to Bruges, and moved into a house in the Pré aux Moulins, where he went on working.

At the beginning of the German occupation of Bruges I wrote two letters urging Gilbert to get away in time, and I received the following reply after the Armistice:

48 RUE LONGUE, BRUGES,  
*December 6th, 1918.*

Your two charming and kind letters, dated respectively Oct. 14th, 1914, and Dec. 23rd, 1914, have just come into my hands, and I hasten to send you a few lines of cordial thanks for your kind thought of me. I cannot imagine where these letters have been in safety all this time, seeing that others, which I know should have been delivered before the arrival of the Germans, have not come to hand. All your news is most agreeable to me, especially what you tell me about Mr. and Mrs. Loudan. I am writing to them as soon as possible, but please, should you see them in the meantime, give them every good wish from me. I hope to go to England soon to see you, and all my good friends again. Poor Lee! I was grieved the other day to hear of his



death. He was my very oldest friend, we were boys together in London, Paris, and Rome. Well, well, we have joys to-day, but alas! we also have great sorrows—mine are almost more than I can bear if I think too much about them. It is the present kindness I am experiencing which lightens my burden.

With every good wish and renewed thanks.

Believe me, sincerely yours,

ALFRED GILBERT.








*Photo. Pickard*

A MANTELPiece FOR SAMUEL WILSON, ESQ.  
In bronze, 1912. In the Leeds Art Museum. Pages 189-192.

## CHAPTER XVI

### AFTER THE ARMISTICE

N his lectures on Art Gilbert always emphasised the importance to the artist of a liberal education. In response to a request to recommend a skilful repoussé-worker who was also an expert modeller, Gilbert wrote: "I fear such a *rara avis* is scarcely to be found amongst the class of men who work for weekly wages; but I hope time and the introduction of education other than is deemed sufficient for the would-be craftsman may mould men into something more malleable than those I have had to deal with. My great difficulty has been to enlist the sympathies and the interest of those workmen I have endeavoured to train into any consideration beyond 'Saturday night'. When I have had a promising lad I have generally found his absolute want of education an impassable barrier. No advice on my part has been able to induce such individuals to study either the ordinary literature, or even the language itself. How can a man hope to excel in one of the most refined of all callings who has not the natural instincts proper to an exponent of it?"

Whilst the genius, no matter how lowly the sphere in which he is born, gravitates instinctively towards education, the one with only a small degree of talent is content to remain oblivious of the wonderful advantages offered him through free libraries, lectures, and museums. On the other hand, the practitioner in Art who belongs to a high social sphere, and is fully equipped from an educational standpoint, has to contend all his life with certain disabilities and barriers which ought not to exist in a broad-minded age. Such an one is classed as an amateur, the inference being that since he is not obliged to earn his own living he cannot be in earnest, and if he produced a masterpiece, public opinion would inevitably decide that it had been carried out by another hand. How often has it been said in disparagement of some beautiful work (and especially that of the

woman artist), "She had assistance, of course. She could never have done it herself."

Gilbert says: "This is an ignorant mistake. Talent is not confined to any class, but is common to all classes. Given two people of equal powers and determination, the one who by force of circumstances has received every facility in education is fully equipped for conquest, and will outstrip the other, who is without equipment, and who may be compared to one starting in a business enterprise without any capital." Instead of discouraging the wealthy and leisured classes from practising as artists, he considers that their efforts should be judged impartially, and all prejudice put aside. Art would receive a great impetus, and would come to a fuller development, if they made themselves proficient in all branches of it, so that as patrons they would need neither experts nor dealers to guide them, but as connoisseurs would exercise a fine discrimination in acquiring real treasures, rather than the worthless productions bought at the instigation of dealers, who create the fashion for some man's work and then exploit it to their own gain. It is the want of real education that allows such an ephemeral thing as fashion to rule out individuality and good taste.

When working with Sir Edgar Boehm, Gilbert became acquainted with the late Count Gleichen, a sculptor of merit, whom he often saw busily engaged at work in his studio at St. James's Palace. His family are noted for their varied artistic gifts, and their devotion to Art. Countess Feodore, the eldest daughter, imbued with exalted aims and poetical vision, followed her father's profession with a steadfastness of purpose that amounted to a passion. She was one of the few sculptors who worked in marble and stone, and who understood the use of the chisel. Confronted all her life by the prejudice I have mentioned, her work never received the appreciation it deserved. Despite discouragements she produced a large number of works, and it is certain that her name will only gain as time measures artistic achievements. Of her Memorial to Lord Kitchener, Gilbert says: "It is the best War Memorial I have seen, admirable in conception, and treatment".

In 1921 Countess Feodore Gleichen and her sister Lady Valda Machell stopped at Bruges to see the master-sculptor again, after many years. Gilbert had not forgotten Lady Valda's musical gifts, and her name revived the memory of a quaint eighteenth-century song he had heard her sing in England—Krassimi's "Victoria". He entered the room to greet them in his buoyant way, humming the melody.

"Thus the song from beginning to end  
I found again in the heart of a friend."

The third and youngest daughter of Count Gleichen is Lady Helena, a clever animal- and landscape-painter, who studied under Arthur Lemon.

The chances and changes of this mortal life are full of uncertainties. Gilbert little thought, as they conversed so gaily, that he would never meet Countess Feodore again. She passed away in 1922, to his very deep regret. And how little did either of the sisters think, at that meeting, that Gilbert would one day return to London and occupy Countess Feodore's studio! But this is forestalling events.

To return to his post-war life in Bruges: the loss of his studio compelled him to produce small statuettes and goldsmith's work, which he fashioned in a small room, under great disadvantages of light and space. About this time he first made the acquaintance, in Brussels, of Mr. Walter Gilbert and his wife, a meeting that was destined to have a deep significance in the lives of both men. The acquaintance ripened into friendship, and later, Mr. Walter Gilbert's son accompanied Alfred Gilbert to Rome. The latter had long wished to visit again the scenes of his early days, to feel the warmth and sunshine of Italy, after the cold damp atmosphere of Bruges. And since what we most desire often comes to pass, Gilbert found himself setting off with his young friend, Donald Gilbert, towards Rome. It proved a time of enjoyment to both, one the younger man will ever look back upon with satisfaction, for he saw Rome in most enviable circumstances.

To the elder man this visit had its note of sadness as well. Who can revisit the scenes of youthful days unmoved? He renewed his



acquaintance with old landmarks, crowded with memories, and found after forty years' absence that countless changes had taken place in Rome. The "Gallinaccio" was still in existence, but all his companions, so full of *joie de vivre*, who had worked and played with equal energy, had long since passed away. The same table stood where he had sat at the head as *Il Presidente*, but his place, and those of his companions, were filled by the most ordinary strangers. Young Bohemia and Romance had been supplanted by the commonplace. Gilbert sat at another table, and thought of his old friends, and missed their merry laughter and gay irresponsible conversation.

His first studio in the Vicola del Vantagio, where he produced the "Kiss of Victory", had long since been swept away, and the site covered with houses. The bridge across the Tiber had been built since he was last in Rome, streets had been altered, and rebuilt entirely, and many old houses replaced by others of magnificent dimensions. But the *Greco*, an ancient rendezvous for artists and writers, was unchanged, with all its interesting mementoes of great thinkers' works on its walls.

Rome, however, had lost a great deal of the old charm it exercised over him, owing to the greatly increased traffic in streets never designed for the network of tram-cars that intersect the whole city. Far too many motors and all kinds of vehicles driven at high speed through the narrow streets threaten the greatest danger to pedestrians. Gilbert, and indeed everyone, had narrow escapes of being run over. The interminable noises of Rome by day and by night, the raucous sounds from motor horns, added to the gramophones that are so popular with the inhabitants, militate against the enjoyment of those who go there for a holiday. Gilbert, who remembers a Rome without trams, motors, electric light, and cinemas, with only *one* theatre, longed for the old times.

In Italy's eager desire for civilisation Rome, with its unique traditions, has become vulgarised and spoilt. The modern spirit ill accords with, and destroys, the illusions surrounding Roman antiquities. Gilbert found the inhabitants had changed greatly since forty years back. No longer do they wear the beautiful national costumes,



*Photo. Hollyer*

PADEREWSKI.

Bronze bust. By permission of the Dowager Lady Lewis.



but aim at the latest fashions and cover themselves with cheap jewellery. The charm of naïveté and simplicity has been supplanted by a greedy and cunning spirit, fostered by the conditions of the War.

The greatest blot on Italy, the spirit of cruelty to animals, which has always existed, still remains. With such an example as their favourite saint, St. Francis of Assisi, is it not strangely inconsistent of a nation to honour his memory, and deny by their actions his whole life's teaching and example? The picturesque service of "Blessing the Animals", held by the Pope at the Vatican, when young lambs are brought to him by the *contadini*, becomes a mere spectacular farce with acts of the greatest cruelty taking place hourly all over Rome and Italy. Here one sees horses, mules, and donkeys overladen, ungroomed, underfed, and worked incessantly, even all Sunday. They never have any holidays, and their cruel owners flog them with great brutality, whilst only the British and Americans ever dream of protesting. All the sorrow in the world is written in dumb misery on their poor patient faces; they are born to nothing but painful slavery to inhuman men. Their harness is generally composed of cords which gall them at every movement, and the carts without springs are far too heavy in weight. Animals with scars from ill-treatment all over them are frequently to be seen, and lame horses dragging highly decorated wine-carts can be seen painfully ascending the high hills round Rome. Emaciated cats and dogs wander about like shadows, timidly sorting over rubbish in the streets in the vain hopes of finding food, mutely apologising for being in existence. Nobody thinks of them, no one cares.

If Italy is ever to rise, a great awakening must first take place, the stigma of cruelty must go, and superstition, ignorance, and low aims be swept aside.

Gilbert went to Perugia and to Assisi, where one or two people still remembered him and his family. In Rome he renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Dehoro, who with his sister had long been resident there.

Returning to Bruges, Gilbert made a room in his house in the



Pré aux Moulins into a studio, where he continued to work at small objects. Thus three more years slipped away. Mr. Francis Paulus had returned from America, where he had been for some time, and was painting his favourite subjects in Bruges. They often forgathered for a chat, and the painter would seek the sculptor for advice. One day Mr. Paulus urged his friend to allow his biography to be written, and Gilbert agreed suddenly, for in a flash he saw a book that appealed to his fancy and imagination, a life's history told in symbolical form through a series of allegories, veiled in mystery, interspersed with his favourite Greek tales. He had always been obsessed with the dual personality of man, and had often pondered on his own "ego" and "alter ego", which like everything about his character is far more strongly marked than is the case with other men. It accounts for the violent extremes that govern his temperament, and the strong contrasts in his character. He now visualised a book in which "Eros" and "Anteros" should play an important part, and was full of enthusiasm over the idea.

Whilst I endeavoured to follow out his wishes faithfully, I saw the futility of the plan from the first. After expending some time on it I decided to start afresh, untrammelled by any other's conception of what the book should be like. But I found the task very difficult, as Gilbert lost interest in it, because it was not in accordance with his own first ideas. Still I did not altogether give up hope, even though my book at the early stage closely resembled Penelope's web; for what was written one day had to be deleted the next. Gradually I got the facts together, by consulting the many documents Gilbert scrupulously kept throughout his life. Some letters were destroyed by the bomb which scattered his studio to fragments, but fortunately his diaries were preserved.

Some old friends came to see him in Bruges, General Arthur Asquith (son of the late Lord Oxford), Mrs. Arthur Asquith, and Miss Manners—both daughters of Lord Manners. Gilbert executed a bust of Lord Manners' little son before he went to Eton, and he can recall an incident which happened when he was staying at Avon Tyrrell, their country house in the New Forest. One day Lord







*Photos. Hollyer*

ST. ETHELREDA OF ELY.

ST. HUBERT.

Bronze figures, 1926, on the Duke of Clarence Memorial in the Albert Chapel, St. George's, Windsor. By gracious permission of His Majesty the King.

Manners' small son was in great excitement over a paper-chase, and he went off on his pony with a number of friends similarly equipped for the chase. At the end of the day Gilbert was walking on the terrace with his host and hostess, and looking down into the valley they saw the little fellow riding towards them. "I have never forgotten that picture," said Gilbert, "for he was a gallant boy, with all the makings of a hero, which he looked; a true type of what England alone can produce to the highest point of excellence." His career was cut off prematurely, for he was killed while serving with the Guards in the Great War.

Lord and Lady Manners were the most hospitable and kind friends imaginable, and their daughters sweet and charming examples of English children.

Lord Manners wanted a memorial made to the late Lady Manners. This necessitated another journey to Rome, which Gilbert took in the following year. Here he worked in great retirement; but friends passing through Rome sought for him, and called at his studio from time to time. Soon after he arrived he found that Mr. George Clausen, R.A., and Mrs. Clausen were staying at the British Academy in Rome, and he was entertained there, and saw the work of the winners of the Grand Prix. The British Academy in its peaceful and lovely surroundings is an ideal spot for the lucky inhabitants. He paid his respects to Sir Ronald Graham, the British Ambassador, the accomplished, indeed ideal, representative of British prestige in a foreign land. He attended a garden party given at the British Embassy, but went to no other festivities. He was very much occupied with two half-length statues, of the late Lady O'Hagan, and of Mr. Edward Stocks Massey respectively. These were cast in bronze and duly despatched from Rome for the Leeds Museum. Both statues are a summing up of the virtues and graces of each individual, without being a cold photographic likeness of the mere material features. They are ideal portraits of two rare characters, of overflowing generosity and kindness, who enriched their native town, and did endless good in their generation. These works are marked by Gilbert's insistence on all the nobility of character and refinement

he invariably visualises in portraiture; ever an optimist in his art, he sees mankind in their most exalted moods.

Holding these views, it was something of a shock to him to visit the Exhibition of the French Academy in Rome! It was an extraordinary and painful example of the degradation that Art has suffered of late years: its blatant incompetency and childish inefficiency caused him to wonder if half the world had gone mad. Truly terrible things were there, such as patients conjure up when their temperatures are  $104^{\circ}$ , and the doctor looks grave! It is hard to believe that those who perpetrate such monstrosities are normal beings. Gilbert, remembering the high standard of work exacted when he was a student, felt nothing but disgust at this Exhibition.

Lord and Lady Manners came to see him in Rome, and this memorable visit was the last one Lord Manners was ever to make. Gilbert cherishes it as a precious memory of one he held in the highest esteem. Lord Manners' death took place in 1927.

Memory is a curious gift to man, for in a second he can be transported to a scene thousands of miles distant. Gilbert, seeing some of the wonderful tombs in Italy, was reminded of the one at Windsor, his own handiwork, and with it came a natural feeling of sadness and regret that it was unfinished. He little knew that he was destined to return to his native land, and that he was standing on the threshold of a new era, perhaps the most important in his whole wonderful life of ideals and ordeals. For this, his later period, was to find him riper in experience, after long years of patient strivings, richer in dexterity and invention, with all his powers increased, not abated, and his mental equipoise more firmly established. His restless youthful spirit and extreme dissatisfaction with all his work, which used to cause him the greatest despair, had given place to a fairer judgment of all he produced. He had arrived at the knowledge that caused Jan van Eyck to write on one of his works, "As well as I could"—and to leave it at that stage of excellence.

When he quitted Rome for his home in Bruges, Gilbert went on working busily, until one day he received a missive from His Majesty, and he obeyed the Royal Command to come to England to finish the

Duke of Clarence's Tomb. About this time the art world had the news of his advent through the following letter in *The Times*:

SIR—I hasten to communicate to your readers information which I am convinced will be received with profound satisfaction not only by the art world in general, but by every lover of art, and by all who take pride in the Art of England and care for her reputation among the nations.

It has become known that Mr. Alfred Gilbert has returned from his self-imposed residence abroad by reason of it having been arranged that he should now complete that marvel of beauty the Tomb of the Duke of Clarence in the Albert Memorial Chapel at Windsor, which has remained unfinished for so many years. With this object in view he has arrived in London and is already preparing to set about his long-deferred work.

It will be infinitely gratifying to his many friends and admirers—amongst whom his fellow-sculptors are in the front rank—that the great artist should be once again in their midst, in full vigour of mind, of ability, and of enthusiasm. A new generation has sprung up since Mr. Gilbert sent his last contribution to the Royal Academy in 1907, soon afterwards resigning and retiring to work quietly in Bruges. The effect of his return will be stimulating in this country in a high degree, for the genius of the man for art if not equally for business, will be a renewed spring of inspiration.

He may be destined, like so many others of his noble class, as history shows, to live to the end the poor man he has always been: but England will be richer for his presence, and the Royal Academy should be the happier for the return to this country of one of the greatest of those who have added honour and dignity to its rôle.

Your obedient servant,

M. H. SPIELMANN.

THE ATHENÆUM, *July 31st*, 1926.

The morning this letter appeared proved a very busy one for Mr. Spielmann, who received forty-eight trunk calls; and for weeks he was inundated with letters and callers requesting to know where Gilbert was to be found. His friend, however, realising the importance of leaving the artist undisturbed, refused these requests, stating his reasons. As can be imagined, this left the Press dissatisfied; but, notwithstanding, they loyally and enthusiastically expressed, in hundreds of articles, their extreme gratification that he had returned to England. They respected his wish to be left in peace, and waited



for further developments. When the Royal Society of Sculptors awarded him their highest honour, the Gold Medal for his services to art, the Press warmly congratulated him.

Three Royal studios were placed at his disposal. He chose the late Count Gleichen's at St. James's Palace, graciously offered him by Lady Helena Gleichen, where he erected the five beautiful figures for the Duke of Clarence's Tomb at Windsor. The history of these figures may now be disclosed, and the mystery surrounding the original five removed. When the Duke of Clarence Memorial was made Gilbert was dissatisfied with five of them, which he kept in his studio, with the intention of making others to replace them. But the heavy ordeals which clouded his life at this time altered his plans. Confronted with the disturbing thought that these precious figures for the King must inevitably fall into the hands of strangers, who would exploit them to other uses, and unable to remove anything under his roof since he had claimed "Protection of the Court", he did the only thing possible in the circumstances, and destroyed them, with others of his works.

True to his character, Gilbert *never explained* his action, which is to be deplored. It gave his enemies an opportunity, which they took good care not to miss, and many wild stories were circulated, which did him great harm for years. It left his friends puzzled as to the reason, which they attributed to the eccentricity of genius. It was nothing of the kind, and it caused the sculptor many a pang, both at the time and afterwards, to destroy work that had cost him infinite pains to produce. But in regard to the Clarence Tomb he knew that he could build them up again in Bruges, improving upon his first efforts. This he did as soon as he reached Bruges, making them this time in wax, when he had them duly photographed. There they stood in his studio for many a long year, but nobody knew of their existence, save a friend or two, for Gilbert never explains!

When the final arrangements had been made for Gilbert's return to finish the Clarence Memorial, it was suggested that these wax figures, already completed, should be cast in bronze and put into the niches. But by this time the wax had crumbled in places. They

needed a good deal of repair after being rescued from a shelled studio during the War, and Gilbert's first dissatisfaction as to their suitability to a sacred edifice returned. He did not consider them devotional enough in character for the rest of the tomb, and decided to do them again. The wax figures were not brought over, but they are destined later to be placed in one of our great National Museums, at the request of His Majesty.

When one compares these early works with the wonderful latest ones, Gilbert's decision will be upheld. Those in wax are marked with all the naïveté and charm of his earlier period, combined with an intensely strong dramatic feeling, but the devotional spirit is not insisted upon, and one only feels that the master in his latest period has gained greatly in this sublime quality, so that his five latest figures in their grave sweet majesty, dignity, and wistful magnificence have actually eclipsed the first rendering, showing that the sculptor has only gained in power and invention, through long experience.

Are the ordeals and trials which a man has to encounter throughout life of no use save to embitter him? In the great artist's case he brings to his work all his joys and sufferings; and, because he is capable of enjoying and suffering far more deeply than others, he is able to incorporate both joy and anguish in his productions. There is not the slightest doubt that these qualities so strongly insisted upon, unconsciously, in Gilbert's work, are what touch the hearts of men and women, whether they are artists or not, from the most cultured understanding, to the humblest and poorest, in the land. "Where is that there h'Eros gone?" said a working-man on a bus, as it passed through Piccadilly Circus. "*I miss him!*"

The five new figures are St. Hubert, St. Nicholas, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Etheldreda, and St. Catherine of Egypt, and their legends are these:

St. Hubert, Bishop of Liège, A.D. 727, was born in 656, married Floriban, daughter of the Count of Louvain, and as a young man was too fond of hunting the wild boar in the forests of the Ardennes. The story of his conversion is that he went hunting on Good Friday, and whilst in a thicket encountered a huge stag with a crucifix between

its horns. He heard a voice saying, "Turn to the Lord, or thou wilt fall into the abyss of hell!" He dismounted at once, and falling on his knees before the miraculous cross prayed for guidance. The voice said, "Go to Maastricht, to my servant Lambart, and he will tell thee what thou must do". The stag then disappeared. Hubert obeyed, and finally became a hermit in the Ardennes. After ten years, during which he became the patron saint of hunters, he took a journey to Rome. St. Lambart had been murdered, and at the same hour an angel appeared to Pope Sergius I., and gave him the pastoral staff of the martyred Bishop, telling him to ordain in his stead a man he would meet on the basilica of St. Peter's. According to the legend, the Pope awoke with St. Lambart's staff in his hand. So he went to the appointed spot, and gave St. Hubert the staff, consecrating him to the vacant See of Tongern! Further, during the ceremony an angel brought the Pontifical habit of St. Lambart and gave it to St. Hubert. A white silk stole was supplied by the Blessed Virgin, embroidered by her with gold braid—St. Peter attended, saying Mass and presenting St. Hubert with a gold key. The stole is in the church of the Abbey of St. Hubert, and, curiously enough, is used to this day as a charm against hydrophobia. The horn St. Hubert used when hunting is also to be seen in the church.

St. Catherine of Sienna, A.D. 1380. This saint had a vision of our Lord appearing with a crown of gold and a crown of thorns. Asked which she would choose she placed the crown of thorns on her head as a symbol that she was ready to endure all suffering for His sake.

St. Etheldreda of Ely, descended from King Edwin, the first Christian King of Northumbria, was fond of enhancing her beauty by the lavish display of jewellery. Her relatives persuaded her against her will to marry Prince Tombert, but the saint really preferred to give her life to good works. When she became a widow she married Egfrid, but later obtained a separation so that she might enter a nunnery. Her husband followed her, and she fled from the convent disguised as a poor woman. At last she arrived at her first husband's estate, where she settled down, and became the lady bountiful. She built a monastery, and won the confidence and love of all. She died

young, but her influence and memory lingered long after her demise, and one of the large trees on her estate was reputed to have grown from the staff she carried on her journey by foot when she escaped from the convent and, incidentally, her second husband.

St. Catherine of Egypt was martyred for her faith, being broken on the wheel.

Gilbert, who chose to represent certain living types for some of his figures on the tomb, has immortalised the features of the beautiful Duchess of Rutland in this figure. While he never works from the living model, he sums up certain characteristics, which he makes use of.

For Edward the Confessor he chose Watts the painter, and for St. George his friend Burne-Jones.

St. Nicholas of Myra, the patron saint of boys and sailors, also represents Russia, for it was Gilbert's idea to make the Clarence Tomb of international significance by a linking together of the rulers of Europe with whom our Royal Family are closely allied, symbolised by their patron saints—thus speaking eloquently of the universal sympathy of Europe with the Prince and Princess of Wales in the hour of their sorrow.

The five figures were finished and placed in their niches, when their Majesties visited the Memorial Chapel, and Gilbert had the honour of showing them his recent work, and explaining its symbolism. He afterwards lunched at Windsor Castle, where he spent a most enjoyable day, and received a cordial welcome from those who remembered him in his early days at work on the Clarence Memorial.

But long before the figures were completed Gilbert left St. James's Palace Studio for one at Kensington Palace, which His Majesty most graciously had specially prepared for him. Here he is now in residence, and it would be impossible to find a more congenial spot. Kensington Gardens are beautiful at all seasons, and afford to the artist a never-ending source of inspirational value and delight. Here in great tranquillity he can muse and work; for ideals have overcome ordeals in the evening of his life.

## CHAPTER XVII

### RETROSPECTS



HE closing of these memoirs entails a looking back down the long road Gilbert has traversed, and recalling the friendships made at various stages of his journey. Ever inclined towards retrospection, he further fostered the habit during those dolorous years in Bruges, without any incentive to look forward. In his musings he realised how much he owed to three men, Corbett, Lee, and Lanteri, who caused him to put forth all his powers in the desire to gain their approbation, and that they, with his ever-wonderful mother, had stimulated him to his highest efforts in his early days.

Later came the gentle influence of one who reigns in the memory of the nation, the beloved and lovable Queen Mother, Alexandra. As a small child at his first school at Southsea, the excitement and glamour of the Sea-King's daughter coming as the Prince's bride, the gorgcous preparations and rejoicings, made a deep impression. He saw her portrait everywhere; she was beautiful beyond words, and her image was stamped upon his young heart as a fairy lady, too wonderful for this world. When, as a full-grown man, he first met her, all his chivalry and reverence were aroused. Beautiful she was; but beauty alone leaves the beholder cold. Her greatest power and charm was the goodness she radiated, which made her subjects adore her. It was peculiarly fitting that Gilbert should make her memorial, animated as he has always been by the deepest feelings of devotion, and he alone could immortalise her virtues by symbolism. He regards his work as a labour of love.

It was a happy thought to establish a memorial to her by ensuring the continuance of one of her chief charitable schemes, the care of the sick. But those who loved her wanted a visible memorial for all time, that future generations would be reminded of this Royal lady's deeds. Thus it came to pass that as the funds grew into large pro-





ALFRED GILBERT, 1928.  
From a photograph by Frederick Hollyer.



portions for the first memorial, the visible memorial was started, and grows daily as I write. Grows in beauty, grows in splendour, for of the maker it may be said: "His heart is in his work, and the heart giveth grace to every part". A committee was formed with the Duke of Portland as president, and a site chosen outside Marlborough House, facing Friary Court, St. James's Palace. The memorial will harmonise with the Gothic character of Friary Court, but not Gothic as it is generally understood, for Gilbert creates his own Gothic, as he did in the Clarence Memorial.

The central group of "Faith, Hope, and Charity" or "Love" (Gilbert takes the Greek rendering of "Charity") will be placed in a setting of the utmost magnificence and richness in the form of a shrine, and the central figure, "Love", will be directing the figure of a young boy across the "Waters of Life", with "Faith" and "Hope" on either side, supporting "Love" in her ministrations of mercy. There will be no reproduction of any conventional portrait of Queen Alexandra, though the central figure will bear a fleeting likeness to her; instead, it will be her spiritual gifts and virtues that will be made apparent through symbolism. A shrine suggests a "grille" surrounding it. This will be a most elaborate design, in which doves represent the good forces triumphing over dragons, the evil influences of the world. Ornament and design the sculptor delights in; this work gives him full scope to indulge his imaginative skill. Never in the whole course of his career has he worked under such ideal conditions, nor with such perfect freedom to produce his heart's desire. It is impossible to say how far this memorial may not develop, but one thing is certain, it will be mighty in conception, and sublime in treatment. He has overcome one great obstacle of his life in passing beyond his dissatisfaction with his own efforts. I have seen him at work and noted that everything he does remains unchanged. He is satisfied with it. The knowledge that he is understood, and his aims appreciated, gives him courage and hope to go forward. What this means to the artist only he can estimate.

Gilbert's methods of working differ from those of other sculptors. Before he begins his work he makes no set plans that may limit or

fetter his imagination later. Like a tree or a plant it grows from the base; he works entirely by suggestion, using the sub-conscious mind all the time.

One of his earliest friends has been H.R.H. The Princess Louise. As an artist herself, she has always had a deep sympathy with those who follow the difficult calling of Art. She is not only a sculptor, but an accomplished painter in oils and water-colours. Many years have passed since she attended a ball at Devonshire House, wearing an historical costume she designed. Her crown, made by Gilbert for that occasion, was afterwards kept carefully packed, until recently, when the Princess Louise decided to present it to South Kensington Museum.

An inspiring friend, and a never-failing good counsellor, is Violet, Duchess of Rutland, as a series of wonderful letters that passed between them, extending over many years, proves. Endowed with extraordinary beauty and fascination and gifted in many directions, but particularly as an artist, she is able to understand the artistic temperament, and the ordeals that surround the genius, and by her sympathetic insight to lighten the burdens Gilbert imposes upon himself. No one can dispel gloom so quickly as she, when she appears like a ray of sunshine with her message of hope. Before me hangs a portrait she made of her little son, Lord Haddon, a child of great beauty, and the whole tragedy of her life is embodied in it. Gilbert was summoned to Belvoir Castle to take the death-mask of her child, and the tender pity with which he did his work will ever remain in her heart. It was his suggestion that the mother's hand should carry out the memorial to this beloved child. The proposal was a wise one, which she acted upon. Her training in sculpture at that time was very slight, but she set to work to master the medium, and found some solace from her grief in her difficult task.

She is now at work on a design that will complete the tomb in the grounds of Belvoir, where the late Duke of Rutland and Lord Haddon are buried. Five plaques, with portraits in relief of herself, the late Duke, and her three daughters, will be erected according to her design, under her supervision.

An outstanding character, an independent thinker, with great tact and judgment, Violet, Duchess of Rutland, will live in history as one who definitely left her mark on her generation, and especially on the epoch Gilbert made in establishing a renaissance in sculpture. She was one of the first to welcome him back to England, and to take an absorbing interest in the memorial to Queen Alexandra.

Visions of many connected with the Courts of Queen Victoria and King Edward arise to Gilbert: of Lord Knollys, Sir Dighton Probyn, Admiral Keppel, Sir Henry Ponsonby, and other examples of our aristocracy. Miss Charlotte Knollys, ever associated with Queen Alexandra, Lord Stamfordham, who came to see him at St. James's Palace on his return, and Sir Frederick Ponsonby, worthy successor to his father, the most courteous, kind, and delightful friend to the artist—a great diplomat. Sir Frederick Ponsonby has abundantly proved his friendship to Gilbert, and he is among those who are helping him to-day in the most delicate unobtrusive way imaginable, by their cordial appreciation and interest in his work, and by indefatigable service. Amongst them are the Duke of Portland, Sir Lionel Earle, Sir Philip Freeman, Lord Esher, Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, Lord Edward Gleichen, Mr. Mitchell, and Mr. Walter Gilbert. Sir Lionel Earle has spared no pains in carrying out the King's desire that he should lack nothing. Gilbert is indebted to his foresight in the choice of his present charming dwelling-place, and in every respect Sir Lionel Earle has proved an unfailing friend. Gilbert says that had he been so privileged in the past as to have secured this very gallant bevy of gentlemen relieving him from all material anxieties, loyal, disinterested, and self-sacrificing, it is certain that he would have been spared the ordeals he has had to endure.

Conspicuous amongst the friends of his youth are Mr. M. H. Spielmann and Mrs. Spielmann, whom he holds in high esteem and affection. Mr. Spielmann's services to Art, and his loyal appreciation of Art, have been of great value as an antidote, in an age when anyone can assume the position of art critic, ignoring Whistler's pithy advice—"When you don't know, inquire!" Sir Isidore Spielmann, his brother, in his scholarly attainments rendered services to national



Art in the signal capacity of Commissioner at various foreign exhibitions, particularly in Paris, and through his tact and knowledge upheld the value and dignity of British Art. Mr. William Wyllie, R.A., and his wife were amongst the first to renew their old acquaintance and to welcome Gilbert's return to England. Mr. Wyllie is an unceasing worker at his art, and has many interests besides. He possesses the secret of making life a joyous thing: he will tell you that he is aware that he is not getting younger, but it troubles him not at all. Endowed with amazing vigour of body and mind, he makes life rich and full of pleasure. He is a great sailor, and his house on the sea at Portsmouth affords ample opportunities for indulgence in his hobby. A diverting sight is to witness the two veteran artists in earnest converse over a wide range of topics, all Gilbert's optimism asserting itself.

Dear friends of a younger generation are Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Illingworth, whose warm welcome and hospitality he enjoyed on the rare occasions when he came to England. He looks forward to seeing them again. His thoughts turn regretfully to those real friends who have passed away, to Sir George Lewis, kind and good, whom he wished to see again, and Lord de Vesci, a valued friend—and others whose names it would be impossible to mention individually. Time the Reaper gathers them in turn, and in twenty-eight years there are many changes inevitably. To those living who have written asking to see him, he trusts they will know that he cherishes old memories and hopes to see them again when his work is completed. He has been inundated with letters and invitations he finds impossible to reply to, or accept, not alone on account of the time it involves, but also because, working by deduction and suggestion, as he does, any distraction would break the thread of his thoughts, and prove fatal to his creations. What is imagination and the thoughts that flit so lightly across the brain? Illusive as a piece of thistledown floating in the breeze, evanescent as a snowflake that dissolves before it reaches the ground—and ephemeral as a butterfly's wing, that the slightest touch reduces to powder.

\* \* \* \* \*

In closing these memoirs, in which I have only given a few glimpses of a unique character, I feel that the history of a man's life must ever be an incomplete record of unutterable strivings. I have explained, but not apologised. Gilbert stands on too high a pinnacle of fame to require anyone to take up a brief for certain actions of his, which have only become mysterious because he never explains! These actions, due to his peculiar temperament, have always militated against one person—himself. If he has kept clients waiting, has he not been the loser? No one with the slightest regard to the main chance would ever dream of doing so, for his own sake. There are many examples amongst artists of men who have always worked with "Punctuality and Despatch" as their motto, and they have enriched themselves, and pleased their clients, but they have never produced work for all time. From the true artist's standpoint, Gilbert is right in never sending out work until he is satisfied that it is the best he can do, and this was the spirit in which the old masters worked. In Gilbert's life I find that he became famous too early for his own happiness. He undertook the grave responsibilities of life too early. He overtaxed his brain and physical energies in producing too many works in too short a period of his life. The Clarence Memorial, for example, was a lifetime's work, and any artist would be proud to have produced this one work alone—in a lifetime! One may question the wisdom of his methods of working at lightning speed without ceasing for days together until he had finished, when he collapsed, as, for instance, over the Sketch Model for the Clarence Memorial, and again, his ninety-eight hours' vigil to discover the secrets of Cera Perduta casting.

Then, his disregard of the absolute necessity to take holidays. Though abnormally strong, the sum total of nervous expenditure after a few years left him exhausted, and he needed a complete rest and change of ideas, besides freedom from mundane cares and worries. This he never got, and long before he left England for Bruges, he was actually in such a serious state of broken nerves that any doctor would have prescribed cessation from all work for a long period. But he sought no such advice. He struggled on, feeling that

others were dependent upon his efforts, and trying to manage his complicated affairs. It is small wonder that he was unable to cope with them, and it is surprising that he retained his reason.

The sculptor's life has more difficulties than a painter's. It has few rewards, and it is full of disappointments. Commissions that are promised to him often fail to materialise, or there is not sufficient money to carry out the work. He makes "sketch models" for works that only exist in name; and if he is a good sculptor he destroys an immense amount of work that the world never sees, because it does not reach his ideals.

The superman must do all his work himself: assistants cannot help him. Gilbert has done all his own work unaided, and it is amazing that he should have produced so much work as he has done, in these circumstances. The remuneration he has received has seldom covered the cost even of the materials he has employed. The Piccadilly Circus Fountain is only one example of many, and a great expert who saw one of his greatest works recently observed that "it was never made for £35,000!" Similarly, more than twenty of his works of art were actually *given* to their present owners! Of the rest he has never asked an adequate sum, all of which is the artist's own doings—but then, he has never been able, temperamentally, to grapple with finance.

History repeats itself, and in similar lives one finds the same characteristics and disabilities. Michael Angelo's diary speaks of his utmost misery, his need of sympathy and help whilst doing his great work. He could not find one person in Rome to minister to his daily wants. He went without food, and taxed himself to the verge of losing his sight and mental powers, obsessed by the idea that has always pervaded the great creative minds, that the message they have to deliver to the world must come before every earthly consideration, and that they, themselves, are less than nothing in comparison with it, for, pushed and driven by some unseen mighty force to give it in all its grandeur to posterity, they sacrifice wealth, worldly advantages, and enjoyment of life whilst doing so. It is the travail of the soul. The same spirit animated Palissy the Potter, in abject poverty, urging

him to sacrifice his furniture to keep the furnace alight to discover the secret he finally won. Such methods too often defeat their own end. Men of genius have perished miserably by the way instead of reaching the goal they aimed at.

The inference is that the genius should be prized and honoured, and taken care of, as a national asset, because he is quite unfitted to cope with everyday life. But the world cannot understand such uncomfortable obsessions—the average man wants to live as easily as he can, to escape trouble as far as possible; and to do this he must make money. He regards the artist, inventor and reformer as more than a little mad, forgetting how much he owes to them for the things that uplift humanity. Without such flaming souls we should be a people without progress or ideals. The history of a nation is written in the book of its art, and the men who sacrifice all they hold dear to an ideal are those who, one by one, build up a lasting edifice to a nation's honour and happiness.

Gilbert stands as the embodiment of self-abnegation. He has preached it in his lectures, and practised it in his daily life. He might have been an exceedingly wealthy man, if he had been able to suffer business instincts to enter into his mentality. A man of extremely simple ideas as regards his own wants, he has given himself to others, and his guerdon has been that he has been woefully misunderstood.

It was a fine thing that he should come back to the land of his forbears. In music, in art, as actors, navigators, and discoverers, they served their generation faithfully, and gave a descendant who has eclipsed them all. His Majesty's decision was a wise and just one, and Gilbert's new era is fraught with universal acclamation. To King George, "Father of his people", he offers his homage and feels that he can best repay his generosity in bestowing so much upon him, by throwing his whole heart into the work that shall immortalise Queen Alexandra. Of King George and Queen Mary, whom he recollects as a bride, and who has since proved an ideal Queen, he says fervently, "Long may they reign". To all his friends—"Au revoir, pas adieu".







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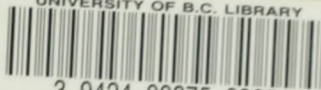
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